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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE LITERARY IMAGINATION AND THE CURRICULUM

BY

DENNIS J. SUMARA ©

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled ***The Literary Imagination and the Curriculum*** submitted by Dennis J. Sumara in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This work is dedicated to two women —
Celia Oberberger Pilecki and **Frances Meier Oberberger** —
who taught me the importance of finding the words to say it.

ABSTRACT

Why do we read literary texts with students in school? What is the value of interpreting these reading experiences? These questions guide this hermeneutic study into the function of the literary imagination and the school curriculum. The interpretations presented emerge from discussions of literary texts read by a group of secondary school English teachers, observations of their teaching, and discussions with their students. These interpretations are informed by theories of literary criticism and reader-response, philosophical hermeneutics, studies in cognition, and curriculum theory.

The primary purpose of the study is to show how the reading of literary texts collects and re-organizes everyday lived experience. Although it is suggested that the identity of the reading-self is altered because of reading, it is also suggested that this reading-self cannot be subtracted from the ecology of lived experience. The act of reading the literary text is shown to participate in the transformation of remembered histories, as well as present and future action in the world.

The term "embodied action" is used to indicate that the body is both a biological and phenomenological structure. It is also used to indicate that cognitive systems are not confined in the brain, but instead occur in and through the body. As well, the idea of embodiment shows that meaning is not something in the world or in the body but, instead, exists in the embodied relations that human subjects have with a world. This concept is described as the unity of *us/not-us.*

Curriculum is described as a culturally created and socially situated set of relations that comprise what teachers and students do in schools. However, it is shown that the *identities* of students are not the *result* of curriculum but, rather, *co-emerge* with all of the components of curriculum as these exist in the world. As well, curriculum is described as an act of *re-covering* where processes of identification and deferral occur simultaneously. It is suggested, therefore, that curriculum requires continual hermeneutic interpretation.

Finally, it is suggested that like all relations in the world, curricular relations co-specify one another and, as a result, must always be read *in relation to* one another. Because the literary text has the ability to re-organize experience, a curriculum which contains interpreted readings of literary texts sometimes allows teachers and students to perceive what they had not previously been able to perceive. It is concluded that interpreted horizontal readings of classroom relations which include literary readings can help students and teachers to more deeply understand the architecture of the lived curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In her essay "Bodyreading" Madeleine Grumet describes what it is like to conclude a writing project:

> Think of the repugnance one often feels for a text that is recently completed. There, clinging to all the lines, are the shreds of the ideas that never quite made it to expression, fragments of the negative example, the other possibility, that the sentence, the chapter, the ideology, the deadline, the habit, the defense mechanism just could not admit. Only time and forgetfulness smooth these rough edges so that we no longer remember what has been left behind and then the text that has seemed partial, merely provisional, prevarication, becomes THE TEXT clear, complete, necessary and sufficient.[1]

This was certainly how I felt soon after typing the last words of the last chapter of this text for, in the end, choosing what *to* say was generally easier than abandoning what was *not* said. However, as I continue to live through seemingly endless revisions, and the final ritual of composing these introductory pages, I am beginning to forget (already) all "the shreds of ideas that never made it to expression." This text has nearly become THE TEXT and I suppose that it eventually must, for it is time for this writing to end so that room can be made for another idea, another writing, another life. However, before THE TEXT occurs it is important for me to remember and acknowledge those persons who have been influential in this life of mine that has included this research and this writing. Although there have been many such persons there are a number to whom I would like to specifically offer my gratitude.

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[1] Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 145.

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Chapter One

WONDERING WHILE WANDERING

> Whatever may be the individual contents which come into the world through a work of art, there will always be something which is never given in the world and which only a work of art provides: It enables us to transcend that which we are otherwise so inextricably entangled in — our own lives in the midst of the real world.
>
> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading*[1]

> The reaching out for a book needs to become an organic action. ...Pleasant words won't do. Respectable words won't do. They must be words organically tied up, organically born from the dynamic of life itself.
>
> Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *Teacher*[2]

> Television has not ruined reading. Reading in school has trained us for television.
>
> Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk*[3]

> Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read Kipling slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses. He is a writer who used pen and ink. He looked up from the page a lot, I believe, stared through his window and listened to birds, as most writers who are alone do. Some do not know the names of birds, though he did. Your eye is too quick and North American. Think about the speed of his pen. What an appalling, barnacled old first paragraph it is otherwise.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

One of my favourite activities during my years as a junior high school English language arts teacher was reading literary texts aloud to my students. Over time, I developed a repertoire of personal favourites which were read to classes year after year. One of these was Katherine Paterson's novel *Bridge to Teribithia*,[5] the story of a deep and enduring friendship between two ten-year-old children. Because this one had the power, at certain times, to completely envelop me in a stretch of plot which left me at the mercy of any emotion that the experience of reading generated, I was always careful to assign as "silent reading" those sections to which I knew I was particularly vulnerable. However, as Margaret Hunsberger reminds us, the experience of re-reading is always a new experience and, because of this, the emotions which are generated can never be predicted.[6] And so it was, that one day in the midst of reading a "safe" passage to my grade seven class, I found myself unexpectedly immersed in emotion. The episode in question takes place between ten-year-old Jesse and his teacher, who has called him into the hallway. Now Jesse has never liked Mrs. Myers and, like most of his classmates, refers to her as "monster mouth Myers." And so, he was stunned when he realized that her purpose for calling him into the hallway was to convey her condolences over the death of his best friend and classmate, Leslie Burke, and, at the same time, to share her own experiences of grieving with him:

> She came over so close to him that he could smell her dime-store powder.
>
> "Jesse." Her voice was softer than he had ever heard it, but he didn't answer. Let her yell. He was used to that.
>
> "Jesse," she repeated. "I just want to give you my sincere sympathy." The words were like a Hallmark card, but the tone was new to him.
>
> He looked up into her face, despite himself. Behind her turned-up glasses, Mrs. Myers' narrow eyes were full of tears. For a minute he thought he might

---

[1] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 230.

[2] Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *Teacher* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 33.

[3] Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 144.

[4] Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1992), 94.

[5] Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Teribithia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

[6] For an insightful essay on the experience of re-reading see Margaret Hunsberger "The Experience of Re-reading," *Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 3,* no. 2, (1985):161-166.

> cry himself. He and Mrs. Myers standing in the basement hallway, crying over Leslie Burke. It was so weird he almost laughed instead.
>
> "When my husband died" — Jesse could hardly imagine Mrs. Myers ever having had a husband — "people kept telling me not to cry, kept trying to make me forget." Mrs. Myers loving, mouring. How could you picture it? "But I didn't want to forget." She took her handkerchief from her sleeve and blew her nose again. "It — it — we — I never had such a student. In all my years of teaching. I shall always be grateful — "
>
> He wanted to comfort her. He wanted to unsay all the things he had said about her—even unsay the things Leslie had said. Lord, don't let her ever find out.[7]

Of course Jesse couldn't unsay those things; he couldn't take back that which had already passed. But in this moment with Mrs. Myers in the hallway, grieving over the tragic death of Leslie, they established a relational bond that changed not only the moment and all future moments, but also all memories of what had gone before. Although their encounter could not change past events, it could not help but affect *memories* of those events, for memory is a collective phenomenon; past events can only be seen within the fabric of space between the remembered event, the present moment, and thoughts of what might be.

As I read this passage to my class — one which I had read at least a dozen times to other classes — I realized that I was suddenly there with Mrs. Myers and Jesse. I was with them in their grief. It had become part of my "real" life at that moment. And so, I cried with them — a private, intimate moment made public. It was during that moment that I was no longer simply "the teacher" acting in the location we call the classroom, but instead was involved in a situation in which the fictional and real texts of my lives were re-united. I was, as Cynthia Chambers has suggested, "bearing witness" to something announced by a text which had scooped up my out-of-school life and presented it to me in this event of curriculum.[8] As I finished reading that passage, moved on to finish the chapter, and then to resume my role as teacher in the "real world," I realized that reading this book with these students had been a moment removed from the dailyness of classroom life. For a few seconds it had been quieter than usual; there had been less shuffling, less movement. Time had slowed down. We had entered the world of what Margaret Hunsberger has called "not-time" — a world in which the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction became blurred, causing us to lose a sense of the ongoing march of present time.[9]

It was during this brief interlude when I realized that my unplanned, public display of emotional response to the literary text had altered all of the relationships in that classroom. Just as Jesse would never be able to remember past encounters with Mrs. Myers without thinking of their shared grief, I would never be able to think of the reading of this novel to this class without recalling what had contributed to my unanticipated response. Why would tears arrive on this day, and not during other readings? Was it that I was reminded that it had been almost exactly one year since our much-loved principal had died suddenly from a brain aneurysm? Or perhaps I was reminded that other people I loved would die without warning. Or perhaps I was reminded that someday I would die too. What does it mean when what Natalie Goldberg has called the "root thought" penetrates the usual busyness of other thoughts?

---

[7] Paterson, *Bridge to Teribithia,* 125.

[8] In her article "Student JournalsPrivate Lessons in Public," Cynthia Chambers explains how shared readings of literary texts re-integrate public and private experiences in teacher education classes. She writes: "I invite reflection through children's literature and its exploration of the phenomenology of the lived experience of being a child and of being human. One of my intentions in reading a children's novel aloud to the class is to demonstrate good language arts practices....On the other hand, these novels themselves and my oral interpretation of the text 'bear witness' to things that matter most in our lives—the experience of friendship, of death, of being a student." In WestCAST Proceedings, ed. Louisa M. Kozey and Caroline D. Krentz (Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Instructional and Development Research Unit), 163. Revised and re-printed in *Analytic Teaching, 42,* 4 (1992): 37-42.

[9] Margaret Hunsberger, "The Time of Texts," in *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text,* ed.William F. Pinar and William M. Reynolds (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 64-91.

> Usually we use thoughts to try to get control of a situation, even the situation of our own mind. These are called second and third thoughts, thoughts on thoughts. We have a raw real root thought that comes from the bottom of our mind — "I am going to die someday" — and instead of staying with that and feeling our fear or curiosity or whatever arises naturally, we grab that thought and try to choke it.[10]

And of course, that is exactly what I did on that day. I grabbed that thought and choked it. Killed it. For thoughts like these do not belong in the English classroom. They certainly should not be felt or expressed in any way by the teacher, for that is not what teachers are supposed to do when the are in the classroom. The teacher is not supposed to cry over a story. The teacher is supposed to be knowing, caring, responsible, but above all *neutral.* There is not room in the school classroom for life that is infused with the kind of passion that goes along with having a body that expresses emotions. And so, when they surface, without permission to do so, those emotions that arrive in tandem with root thoughts must be squelched, squeezed out, choked. It's no wonder that my moment of disclosed grief created such a silent stir. It is unusual to see signs of life in the teacher.

But, of course we all know that there *is* life in the classroom. There are living bodies that collect for blocks of time, several times a day in locations we call math, social studies, science, and English. And in each one of these locations we perform various acts, various performances, various rituals. In the math classroom we learn that four multiplied by four is sixteen, not eighteen; in the social studies classroom we learn that Ottawa is the capitol of Canada, not Toronto; in the science classroom we learn that water is made of hydrogen and oxygen, not helium and oxygen. There is comfort in the right answer. And so, it is not surprising that in the English classroom we do not often get down to the root thought. It is not surprising that we scurry around gathering up and repeating second and third thoughts, for it is easier to ask whether the character is a protagonist or an antagonist than it is to wonder about dying.

Becoming involved with the literary text, however, sometimes takes us to unexpected places, places where second and third thoughts dissipate. And although readers can usually integrate these experiences when reading is done in private, they have more difficulty when these experiences present themselves in the public space of the school classroom. For although we like to believe that there are three things that comprise the curriculum — teachers, students, things to do — I would like to suggest that there is only one: the densely woven fabric of the *lived* curriculum that is the result of each student's and teacher's efforts to maintain a viable relationship between themselves and everything that is not themselves. Neither are there three things in reading — reader, text, meaning — but only one: the lived experience of reading as it becomes part of our ongoing lived experience. So, although we act as though there are disparate parts to reading and curriculum that can be separated out, examined, and then put back in place, this is an illusion created in order to help us to believe that we can actually subtract ourselves from our own lives. My experience of reading *Bridge to Teribithia* with my grade seven students shows, however, that reading, curriculum, and *life itself* are intertextual. Just as I can, in no way, pinpoint the complex way in which my own life is connected to the concentric circles of culture, experience and language, neither can I trace the beginnings and endings of the effects that reading literary texts has had on my life. It is a seamless existence which continues to evolve as I move through the experience of living.

Like everything in the world, then, the classroom is relational. Understood in this way, the classroom cannot merely be seen as a place where subject matter is mastered, where curriculum is covered, or where learning is tested. The classroom becomes a myriad of ever-evolving relationships: between teacher and students, students and each other, teacher and texts, students and texts. Moreover, these relationships overlap and intertwine; we are indeed entangled in them and in no way can discern their beginnings or endings. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, "we are ourselves this network of relationships."[11] Once we understand this, it becomes clear that the texts that are used in schools are not merely things which are transposed onto already existing relationships.

---

[10] Natalie Goldberg, *Long Quiet Highway: Waking up in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 92.

[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans, Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), xx.

Because they are inextricable from life itself, these texts influence, affect, and change the fabric of all the relations in the classroom. Choosing *this* book over *that* is to choose one complete fabric of relations over another, for in pulling one thread of the curricular fabric we alter the whole thing.

Heidegger has helped us to understand that the distinction between human beings and other life forms on this earth lies in the ability for humans to reflect upon their own existence, to ponder their purpose.[12] It is through such reflection that we often have a sense of the intertextuality of life. We know, for example, that all of our actions in the world count and that each one is somehow linked to the other. In his novel *Einstein's Dreams*, Alan Lightman describes the experience of doing *this* rather than *that:*

> Peter Klausen is making his way to the apothecary on Spitalgasse this afternoon of 16 April 1905. Klausen is something of a dandy and hates to have his clothes sullied. If dust messes his clothes, he will stop and painstakingly brush them off, regardless of waiting appointments. If Klausen is sufficiently delayed, he may not buy the ointment for his wife, who has been complaining of leg aches for weeks. In that case, Klausen's wife, in a bad humor, may decide not to make the trip to Lake Geneva. And if she does not go to Lake Geneva on 23 June 1905, she will not meet a Catherine d'Epinay walking on the jetty of the east shore and will not introduce Mlle d'Epinay to her son Richard. In turn, Richard and Catherine will not marry on 17 December 1908, will not give birth to Friedrich on 8 July 1912. Friedrich Klausen will not be father to Hans Klausen on 22 August 1938, and without Hans Klausen the European Union of 1979 will never occur.[13]

Our lived experience in the world is an inextricable weaving of chance and planned encounters, of deliberate and accidental actions. No matter what the action, what the motive, what the intention, what they all share is their inextricable connection to the fabric of the organic whole which comprises life on earth. Does it matter that I chose to read one passage of *Bridge to Teribithia* to my class and not another? Is everything in my life changed because I made connections from the fictional text to my real life? What about my students? Are their lives altered because of the time spent in the publicly announced fusion of the fictive and the real into something we might call the imaginary?

In his book *Hamlet's Castle* Gordon Mills relates an an exchange between Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr as they toured Kronberg Castle in Bohr's homeland of Denmark. Heisenberg wonders:

> Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stone, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul, we hear Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove that he really lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depths he was made to reveal, and so he too had to be found a place on earth, here in Kronberg.[14]

It is not difficult for us, through reflection, to distinguish between different experiences. The experience of reading *Hamlet* and of visiting Kronberg castle comprise different events for Heisenberg yet, as he suggests, the *effect* of these experiences are difficult to distinguish from one another. Does having read and heard about Hamlet change what he *sees*, or does it only change the *significance* of what is seen? Did I understand the exchange between Mrs. Myers and Jesse differently because of my recent experiences, or did I see my recent experiences differently because of my experience of reading? Did my relationship with my students and their's with me change because of this moment of shared response or was it *because* of the already-established pedagogical relationship that I was able to even continue my reading in the midst of this response?

---

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). I offer a fuller explanation of some of Heidegger's ideas in later chapters.

[13] Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

[14] Gordon Mills, *Hamlet's Castle: The Study of Literature as a Social Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976) in Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), .45.

These are largely questions of effect. What effect does the reading of literary texts have on our day-to-day lives? What happens when literary texts are woven into the fabric of the daily curriculum in schools? What does it mean to share a personal response to a literary text in the public space of daily schooling? What does knowledge about the intertextual nature of life itself contribute to an understanding of these questions? Of what concern are these questions to English teachers for whom the literary text is often the primary curricular text? How do the answers to these questions relate to theories of reading, of response to reading, of teaching, and of the relationship between teacher and student? What does all of this suggest about what and how one learns in the English language arts classroom? And finally, of what significance is knowledge about the teacher's life — both in and out of the school classroom — to these questions about reading and teaching?

These are the questions that I have brought to this study of the literary imagination and the curriculum. Although I believe that what we call the curriculum is an infinite array of interwoven and ever-evolving relations, I am not overwhelmed by this complexity, but instead am reassured by it. For although the beginnings and endings of curricular relations can never be located, isolated, or finally fixed — because they are always and already part of each other — they *can* be studied. But they can never be studied in their entirety; they can never be understood by standing back and trying to understand the "whole thing." For, as Wendell Berry has reminded us, trying to understand everything is a futile kind of grasping:

> Understand that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else. Learn, therefore, to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity and glamour.[15]

Following Berry, I have attempted to resist large-scale research and have opted, instead, for rather small-scale inquiries into reading and teaching. What follows is a journey of thinking that I suppose began during my years as a junior high school language arts teacher who knew that shared relations with literary texts were sometimes transformative. Over the years, as I continued to wonder about this phenomenon, I began to wander — through books, university courses, conversations. I began to wander through a life that was not *led* by my wondering, but which co-emerged with it. Like people who grow orchids, race thoroughbred horses, paint pictures, and write novels, I began to live a life that I believe contained what philosopher Albert Borgmann would call a focal thing — something that I cared about; something that existed between me and all the other components of my world.[16] In the midst of this wondering, I read an article by Madeleine Grumet where she asks the simple, but provocative question: "Why do we read books with other people?"[17] Why do we, I wondered? And like Grumet, I wondered why we read them in school. The focal thing had taken root.

It is not surprising, then, that my small-scale research which led to this writing emerged from coming to know Anna, who during my first year of doctoral studies was in one of my classes. Because both Anna and I seemed to be interested in the same sort of "focal thing," I thought of her when I realized that the best way to learn about reading and teaching would be to read with teachers. So I called Anna at home one evening, and asked if she might be interested in forming a reading/study group in her school. "What would we do?" "Well, read, talk, read some more, I guess!" There was no pre-determined plan to this research. In my own mind, I had decided that my investigations would need to be a form of "action research" which, according to my reading of some of the literature[18] and my own experience in other research projects,[19] meant allowing the path of research to be guided and directed by questions which "presented" themselves to those involved in the investigation of some mutually agreed-upon idea. Therefore, although some decisions needed to be made (like deciding to phone Anna), I was convinced that planning the research agenda in advance would limit, rather than broaden the possibilities for my own "wondering."

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[15] Wendell Berry, "The Futility of Global Thinking," *Harpers* (June, 1990), 22.

[16] In *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), Albert Borgmann describes a focal thing as a component of "focal reality," his term for a condition of living which moves away from the hypermodernism of our times. He writes: "The term 'focal reality'... is simply a placeholder for the encounters each of us has with things that of themselves have engaged mind and body and centered our lives. Commanding presence, continuity with the world, and centering power are signs of focal things" pp. 119-120.

[17] Madeleine Grumet, "Lost Places, Potential Spaces and Possible Worlds: Why We Read Books With Other People," *Margins*, 1, (Spring, 1991), 35-53.

Looking back, there is now a clear path of research that can be described. Particular things have been done. Some things that might have been done were not. However, like life itself, it is only in the "looking back" that things appear so orderly and clear. During the course of my investigations into the "focal thing," there were many times when I felt a bit lost, unsure, confused and wished for the "good old" pre-determined research plan. In retrospect, I am pleased that I chose to put up with the ambiguity of it all, for although many deliberate decisions were made that changed the course of the research path, as many *unanticipated* things occurred that dramatically altered the course of my own understanding.[20] It indeed has been a path laid down while walking. And that has been a difference that has made a difference.

Generally speaking, I have always understood this research as a form of action research informed by my studies of hermeneutics, literary theory, curriculum and post-structuralism. The overall theoretical orientation that co-emerged with this research seems to be best summarized by Terrance Carson's description of poststructural forms of action research:

> A real contribution of poststructuralism to action research is the shift in emphasis that it brings about. We are now less concerned about the language *about* theory and practice, and more interested in reflecting on teaching and school life. Rather than debating forms of action research and the relative weight that ought to be given to theory and practice, a space for ethical reflection on action now is opened between theory and practice. ...The difference between poststructuralism and the earlier forms of reflective practice is that poststructuralism does not argue for the resolution of the theory or practice debate. It is content to remain in the space between—in the words of Aoki it is "a multiplicity growing from the middle."[21]

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[18] My interest in action research was initially sparked by a course I took on the subject from my Supervisor, Terrance Carson. In that course we read John Elliott's *Action Research for Educational Change* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1991); William Carr and Stephen Kemmis' *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1986); Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, eds. *The Action Research Planner* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1988); Terrance Carson and Jean Claude Couture, eds. *Collaborative Action Research: Experience and Reflections,* Improvement of Instruction Series, Monograph no. 18, (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Teacher's Association, 1988); as well as a number of articles written by researchers in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia on the subject of action research. I found, however, that I was most influenced by a one hour talk given by Ted Aoki, Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta, who helped me to understand how we always "enter into the middle of things." Good research, he suggested, is like a good life. It requires commitment, dedication, thoughtfulness—all of which require a dedication to that for whom and which we live among.

[19] During my first year of doctoral studies, I was invited by Terrance Carson to become involved in an action research into curriculum development of the required teacher education course in our department (EDSEC 200: "Teaching in the Secondary Schools"). This experience helped me to understand that action research must not devolve into "problem solving" but rather must become more hermeneutically oriented to interpreting our historically effected situations in relation to a particular question that has been presented to us.

[20] Early in my research process Margaret Hunsberger warned me about getting involved in hermeneutic/phenomenological work: "Be prepared to live with a lot of ambiguity!" I have thought of those words many times during the past couple of years!

[21] Ted Aoki, "Legitimating Lived Curriculum: The Other Curriculum That Teachers in Their Practical Wisdom Know," an invited lecture at the Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, New Orleans, April 5, 1992, p. 14, as quoted in Terrance Carson, "Collaboratively Inquiring Into Action Research," in *Exploring Collaborative Action Research,*

This is the way that I have come to understand this work: as a focal thing which functions in the same way as Gadamer's description of a true conversation; something which conducts us, not something which we conduct.[22] And so, after that first initiating conversation with Anna, I sent an open written invitation to teachers in the school inviting them to join our "reading/study" group. Response was excellent, and although the eight initial members eventually became five, it was encouraging for me to know that my colleagues had some of the same questions about English teaching that I had, particularly regarding the teaching of the literary text. For a period of eight months the five of us met once every two to three weeks to share our responses to various literary texts. Although we began with short stories and poetry, we quickly moved to novels. Later in the year, I interviewed the teachers about their readings of some of the novels and, with two of them, focused specifically on discussions of novels that were eventually used by them as classroom texts. Because, at this point, I was interested in learning more about the significance of the literary imagination in the school curriculum, I spent some time in these two teachers' classrooms observing lessons emerging from shared readings of these novels. In addition, I interviewed about half of the students in each classroom, focussing specifically on the intersection of their personal response to the book and their public life in the school classroom.

Although this is a very brief overview of the path taken in this inquiry, it is all that I will provide since I believe that the more specific details need to unfold alongside the hermeneutic interpretations which are to follow. This means that there is not much of a map that has been provided for the reader. In this sense, this dissertation is what Roland Barthes would likely call "writerly" rather than "readerly."[23] The reader is required to do more "writing" while reading than might usually be expected. Therefore, it is important to understand that this text is not a location in itself. It merely *announces* a location — a commonplace in which writer, reader, and text are *gathered up* into something that we call reading. And if these events of reading are to be at all successful, there must be generated some *understanding* that did not exist before the reading. There must be some interpretation, some hermeneutic production.

But of course, this does not mean that the writer is absolved of responsibility. As Elie Wiesel has suggested:

> If I am a good writer, a unique writer, I take your life for one minute, or one hour, into my hand. I take your life and touch it, caress it, soothe it, perhaps break it. It is a tremendous responsibility.[24]

I accept that responsibility. However, if the writer must be responsible, then so too must the reader. Just as I, the inquirer, the writer, needed to lay a path of understanding through a dedication and a commitment to something about which I was wondering (the focal thing), so too will the reader need to commit her- or himself to this text which hermeneutically inquires into that journey. The epigraphs, for example, which begin various sections are not meant to be merely ornamental, nor are they present to simply "announce" what is to follow. They have been selected and juxtaposed with one another just as any sentences in a novel are selected — in order to situate the reader in a place where the imagination might be invoked. The reader is asked, therefore, to think of this reading as *dwelling*, not *touring*, for as Heidegger reminds us, "Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build."[25]

Proceedings of the Ninth Invitational Conference of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, ed. Terrance Carson and Dennis Sumara (Edmonton: The University of Alberta, 1989), vi.

[22] Hans George Gadamer discusses the true conversation in *Truth and Method* , 2nd revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 383.

[23] Roland Barthes discusses this concept in *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974). It is discussed in greater detail in later chapters. The idea is also used as the central theoretical thread in Rebecca Luce-Kapler and my article "Action Research as a Writerly Text: Locating Co-Labouring in Collaboration," *Educational Action Research*, 1 (1993): 387-395.

[24] Heidi Anne Walker, "How and Why I Write: An Interview with Elie Wiesel," *Journal of Education, 162*, no. 2 (Spring, 1980), 63.

[25] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 338.

Chapter Two

THE CONDITIONED IMAGINATION

> The space of literature is not only that of an instituted *fiction* but also a *fictive institution* which in principle allows one to say everything.
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*[1]

> At one blow the power of the artwork rips the person experiencing it ... out of the context of his life ... and yet at the same time relates him back to the to the whole of his existence.
>
> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*[2]

> [T]he imagination becomes, once we make the postmodern turn, the prime means for understanding reality.
>
> Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*[3]

> The fictive brings about the presence of the imaginary by transgressing language itself.
>
> Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and The Imaginary*[4]

> 15 April, 12:15 a.m.
>
> Everybody—Dad, Eddie, Lao Xu—has been busy tonight. I can hear them working in the office.
>
> There were rumours that a Party bigwig named Hu Yao-bang is really sick and may die at any time. Also that when he does there will be a big student demonstration in Tian An Men Square. Apparently Hu had lost his position in the government a couple of years ago because he had been too lenient with student demonstrators at that time. The big boss, Deng Xiao-ping dumped him. Eddie was pretty excited, puffing away like an old steam engine, and Lao Xu looked a little bit nervous.
>
> William Bell, *Forbidden City*[5]

Although this excerpt from William Bell's novel *Forbidden City* contains factually verifiable details (the leader of China *is* Deng Xiao-ping, there *is* a place in Beijing called Tian An Men Square), and is written *as if* it were an actual journal entry, most experienced readers would have no difficulty identifying it as a fictionalized account of an historical event. This may not immediately be clear from the excerpt presented here, since removed from its original context it alone may not announce itself as fiction. Experienced readers, however, by looking at the cover, publisher's notes, and overall structure would quickly identify it as a literary text. Even from this brief passage, we have a sense of "literariness." In an actual journal entry, for example, the writer may not feel the need to include the parenthetical details outlining specifically who "everybody" was, or to describe Eddie as "puffing away like an old steam engine." Expository and descriptive details, together with figurative devices and particular textual structures, become what Peter Rabinowitz has called "rules of signification and notice" which not only point to the literariness of a text, but which also help us to complete the act of making meaning from our engagement with that text.[6]

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* , ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 36.

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd Revised Edition, trans. and eds. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 66.

[3] Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 191.

[4] Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 21.

[5] William Bell, *Forbidden City* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1990), 52.

[6] Peter Rabinowitz's book *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1987) outlines the culturally determined "rules" which enable the author-text-reader transaction. Although these rules are in a constant flux and evolution, his careful explication of these as used by contemporary authors and readers

But is the difference between fiction and non-fiction really as simple and straightforward as I have presented here? Or could it be that "literary" has less to do with fiction and more to do with the imaginary? Are there not journal entries which are indeed very literary, interwoven with figurative language, metaphoric allusions, and unusual syntactic re-positionings? Is Susanna Moodie's book *Roughing it in the Bush* a factual account or literary presentation of a pioneer woman's life in the Ontario bush?[7] Is *The Diary of Anne Frank*[8] an actual account of a young Jewish girl's day-to-day life in hiding during the Holocaust, or are the real-life events woven through with her own yearnings, imaginings, dreams, and illusions? Will I, as a reader of *Forbidden City*, ever be able to visit Tian An Men Square without thinking of my experience of reading about the fictionalized characters' lives in that place?[9] It seems that the line between fact and fiction cannot be neatly drawn. Without references to elements of the real world, the literary text would be totally meaningless, and a daily life without fictional imaginings would be at best dull — likely intolerable.

However, what seems obviously fictional and literary to me, to most experienced readers, and to English teachers, may not be as apparent to student-readers in the classroom. Sixteen-year-old Tim, for example, in the midst of a whole-class oral reading of *Forbidden City*, became confused between historical "fact" and literary "fiction." As his teacher Anna was explaining some of the characteristics of historical fiction in relation to their reading of the novel, Tim became visibly uneasy. After a moment of alternating between attending to the teacher's lecture and flipping through his copy of the novel, he interrupted Anna. "I don't believe that this is fiction! I think that it's real! I think that this really did happen!" Several other students in the class immediately joined in with "Yeah, I think so too!" "Me too!" Anna was surprised by this outburst. Although she knew that many of these non-academic stream students were not avid readers of fiction (hence her decision to orally read the novel with the class), she felt that they would easily distinguish between fact and fiction.

In response to Tim and his classmates, Anna asked why they so strongly believed that the book was entirely factual, that the narrated events were true, and that the characters were real people. "It's the journal entries, Mrs. Pilecki!" explained Tim. "They have the dates at the top, which means they must be true!" Tim went on to explain that because the student revolution in Beijing actually happened during that period of time, the naming of dates by the author was convincing proof that the journal entries were more factual than fictional. Although Anna carefully explained the difference between an historically verifiable fact and an invented fictional detail, it was clear that Tim was unconvinced.

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helps to de-mystify and de-romanticize the process of text-reader interaction. Rabinowitz discusses four major "rules": 1. Rules of notice (to help readers determine what is important and what is not) 2. Rules of signification (to help readers decide the source, the ethical value, the kind of attention to give the rules of notice) 3. Rules of configuration (textual conventions that help readers to make transitions between disparate bits of the story in relation to their own experience) 4. Rules of coherence (the reflective activities that readers impose on the text, helping them to see the work as a whole)

[7] Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958). It is noteworthy that Margaret Atwood, in the *Afterword* to her book of poems based on Susanna Moodie's writings had this to say about the reading which inspired her to write her collection of poems: "Although I had heard of Susanna Moodie I had never read her two books about Canada, *Roughing it in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. When I did read them I was disappointed. The prose was discursive and ornamental and the books had little shape: they were collections of disconnected anecdotes. The only thing that held them together was the personality of Mrs. Moodie, and what struck me most about this personality was the way in which it reflects many of the obsessions still with us." [Margaret Atwood,*The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 62.] Which, then, more clearly re-presents the *truth* of Susanna Moodie's life on the prairies: her own written work, or the poetic interpretations of Margaret Atwood? Or is "truth" to be found in the dialogue which (implicitly) exists between the two?

[8] Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Pocket Books, 1958).

[9] Margaret Hunsberger told me of her experience of visiting China after having read *Forbidden City*. She said that in her drive from the airport to Beijing, she was surprised to notice that the actual arrangement of bushes and trees by the side of the road did not correspond to the mental image that she had constructed from reading the novel. In our conversation about these dissonant images, we wondered which was more real for her, concluding that fictional imaginings and constructions became as much a part of our memories and experiences as those which are actually lived.

Tim's challenge of the conventionally understood fact-fiction dichotomy for the classification of the literary and the non-literary points to the need, in English language arts education, to develop a deeper understanding of the taken-for-granted beliefs about what might constitute the literary text. For although our first reaction to Tim might be of exasperation — "Why can't he see the difference!" — it is perhaps his apparent ignorance that can help us to question previously unarticulated assumptions about the character of the literary text. And so, in this chapter, I would like to take up the question, What is the character of the literary text? More specifically, I would like to explore what we (in Western cultures, at least) might mean when we talk about fact and fiction, literary and non-literary, imaginative and real, aesthetic and pragmatic. Because libraries could be filled with discussions on any of these issues, the discussion which follows is meant address them in relation to Tim's confusion about fact and fiction.

Locating the Literary

Fact , Fiction

It is conventionally understood, within the discipline of the English language arts at least, that what we call literary has something to do with literature, however, whether all literature is comprised of works that are literary is less clear. Although most English language arts teachers understand the word "literature" to mean "literary texts," there are a number of English language arts textbooks, resource books, and curriculum guides which include, in their definition of literature, expository texts, biographies, autobiographies, and historical texts. Given the difficulty of ascribing the status of fact or fiction to any of the latter, it would seem appropriate that the category "literature" might include all forms of written expression, including those which we do not conventionally consider literary.[10] However, because we generally do have a sense that there is something different about things deemed literary, this possibility must be abandoned.

In response to the question "What is literature?" literary critic Terry Eagleton[11] suggests that it is not possible to make the distinction between literature and non-literature on the basis of fact and fiction. Is philosophy fact or fiction? Can historical writing which excludes the experience of women, gays and lesbians, and children (to name a few) be considered historically factual? Alternatively, can historical fiction which includes invented characters acting within historically verifiable events be considered entirely fictional? It seems that categories such as fact - fiction, verifiable - invented cannot account for the distinction between the literary and non-literary.

Eagleton wonders further whether literature might be defined in terms of its particular function. Might a non-literary text have a more pragmatic function than a literary text? This distinction must be quickly abandoned, for it excludes the possibility that the effect of texts often depends upon the ways in which they are read and the purposes for which they are read. It has been demonstrated, for example, that in their reporting of cultures, anthropologists have resorted to "figurative" devices in favor of "literal" ones in order to communicate a particular idea.[12] Alternatively, I.A. Richard's famous experiment with undergraduate students who were asked to analyze and evaluate a set of poems from which had been withheld the titles and authors' names made it clear that, like any cultural artifact, the literary must be culturally defined and normatively ranked. As might have been predicted, the students' resulting judgments were highly variable: well-known and respected poets were ranked poorly, while obscure poets were given high scores.[13] It seems that the quality of literariness, at least in the field of literary criticism, has as much to do with the source (i.e., the author) as the quality of the work. What is considered literary, it seems, is a cultural commodity.

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[10] As part of the process of researching this chapter, I browsed through a dozen or so English language arts "methods" textbooks (those produced for use in teacher education) and, to my surprise, found that most took for granted that "literature" meant "fiction," several made a distinction between "fictional and non-fictional" literature, and only one rendered problematic the idea of "literature" as "literary."

[11] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

[12] For a selection of provocative essays on the intersection of poetics, aesthetics, politics, philosophy and ethnography see *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

[13] Described in I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929).

At the same time, it is well-documented that readers derive pragmatic information from their readings of literary texts. Seventeen-year-old Gina, for example, when asked what she values in her reading of literary texts suggested

> It helps me to understand my own life better. When I read those books I get ideas about how to solve my own problems. When I read *Forbidden City*, I thought of how difficult it was for Alex to have divorced parents, because I'm in that situation too. I wish I could deal with my parents like he did with his.

Therefore, although the situation in the novel may not be real, for many readers the experience of reading serves a pragmatic purpose in their lives. Although the "unreal" quality of the text is acknowledged, its function in the real world seems as important as any expository or descriptive text. Given this, it seems that what we consider literary may not really be characterized as having some non-utilitarian, non-pragmatic function. Because the literary text becomes part of the reader's lived world, it begins to function as a material extension of that world.

Formulative, Communicative

Is there not, however, a minimal structural requirement for "literariness" to become evident?

Philosopher Susanne Langer suggests that although the literary text is comprised of elements of the material world, it does not have a real world correspondence. Therefore, although there were certainly persons who participated in the actual historical events at Tian An Men Square in 1989, they were not the same as the characters presented in the novel *Forbidden City*. No matter how close the correspondence to the historically verifiable, the experience readers have with this novel, according to Langer, is virtual.[14]

Langer makes a further distinction between what she calls the "communicative" function of the literary text and the "formulative" function of other texts. She explains that the former is a type of written discourse which is meant to tell, to explain; the latter is a reconfiguration of this discourse into a form which does not *give* the experience but rather invites the reader into a *potential* experience. Langer makes this distinction by suggesting that

> It is the communicative office of language that makes the actual world's appearance public, and reasonably fixed. The formulative power of words is the source and support of our imagination; before there can be more than animal communication, there has to be envisagement, and a means of developing perception in keeping with conception.[15]

She further suggests that this formulative function of words is marginalized in schools where discourse is generally communicatively instrumental. Although "poetics" is derived from the same material as discursive speech, what is created is not actual discourse, but rather "a composed and shaped apparition of a new human experience."[16] It is only in this formulated space, which is less determined than the communicative space, that the imagination is invoked and the poetic realized.

Although the distinction between the formulative and communicative functions of language is useful, it alone does not seem able to address Tim's concerns about reading *Forbidden City*. It is important to understand that, while Tim was *able* to distinguish between these differing functions, he was *unable* to form a relationship with the book that was different from those he might develop with a non-literary text. Therefore, although there were certainly aspects of the text which we could call *formulative* rather than *communicative*, Tim was not able to engage with them in the way in which Langer suggests would make the literary relationship work. In my discussions with him, it seemed to me that part of the difficulty was his inability to incorporate the "formulative" aspects of the discourse presented in the book into the discursive practices of his own life. In other words, although the novel presented a discourse system which required some imagining, Tim was not comfortable with this sort of discursive formulation, and therefore strongly resisted it. What can we say about this? More importantly, as English teachers what might we *do* about it?

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[14] In *Problems of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957) Susanne Langer equates the virtual in creative objects as a space created by the artist (or in this case the author) which is "new in the sense that it never existed before" (p. 29). Wolfgang Iser, in his phenomenological account of reading (*The Act of Reading*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) implies this use of virtuality within the fictional text itself when he says that "the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (p. 22) and when he explains that "literary texts initiate 'performances of meaning' rather than actually formulating meaning themselves" (p. 22).

[15] Langer, *Problems of Art*, 149.

[16] Ibid., 148.

Paradigmatic, Narrative

Jerome Bruner provides some theory which may not only help us to unravel the knot of the literary/non-literary conundrum, but which may also lead to an understanding of Tim's difficulty with *Forbidden City*. Bruner suggests that the difference between the literary and the non-literary is to be located in the distinction between the paradigmatic mode of thought and the narrative mode. The former, he suggests, "makes use of procedures to assure verifiable reference and to test for empirical truth"[17] and, generally speaking, is driven by various hypotheses whose truth value must be tested in order to be verified. Paradigmatic thinking, on the whole, attempts to banish the particular in favour of the general — to name over-arching theories as a way to understand, predict, and, often, to control the unfolding of events. Typically modern in character, this mode of thinking is that which is generally ascribed status as a vehicle for the determination of truth, method, and universal understanding. It is meant to demonstrate a logic which we are to believe is *natural*, because it is *verifiable*. The most valued feature of paradigmatic thought is its avoidance and/or elimination of ambiguity and contradiction, for these stand in the way of its predictive powers. Although the paradigmatic mode is, in some ways, imaginative in that the generation of hypotheses requires a naming before proving, it is not imaginative in the same way as the narrative mode employed by the poet, the playwright, or the novelist.

Bruner suggests, that when given imaginative applications, the narrative mode "leads to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily true) historical accounts."[18] Although the literary text must draw from the same language and experiential pool as the paradigmatic, it derives its difference through a process which Bruner calls a "subjunctivizing of reality."[19] According to Bruner, to be in the subjunctive mode is to be situated in an "as if" state, where possibilities are considered over certainties. Borrowing from the work of literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov,[20] Bruner demonstrates how the subjunctive mode is fashioned by the author. Todorov proposes that there are six simple transformations that transform the action of the verb from being overly determined to being psychologically in process, and, as such, contingent or subjunctive.[21] Although this is a more complicated theoretical formulation than Bruner presents (or that I have re-presented here), Todorov helps us to understand that literariness has a great deal to do with the way in which particular syntactic formulations invoke our imagination more than others. When the phrase "Dahlia took the money" is transformed into "Dahlia *must* take the money" or "Dahlia intends to take the money," a question — an intriguing space of indeterminacy — is left for the reader. Furthermore, the reader is invited into an experience that is always and forever in the process of being lived through. Although our lived experiences have beginnings and endings, the literary text is always in process. It waits for the reader to become engaged with it.

It is not surprising, then, that Tim should feel convinced that *Forbidden City* was factual. Not only does the format of the narrative, with its dated journal entries, closely resemble an actual journal, its plot evolves within an historically verifiable set of circumstances Paradoxically, it likely was not the "realistic" aspects of the text which made it seem like a non-literary text for Tim, for in interviews he communicated a greater alienation from the factual material than the fictional. For example, Tim had difficulty understanding the differences between Chinese culture and Western culture, particularly as it existed under the constraints of the Communist regime. Therefore, although he was well able to discuss the relationships between characters in this novel, and his own relationship with them, he seemed, at times, unable to make connections between their actions and the political "reality" of that historical period in China. It could be argued that it was the subjunctivizing of language which allowed Tim to interact, in a generative and imaginative way, with the text and, as a result, to make him feel as though the action was real. For of course, Tim's reading experience *was* real. Furthermore, because the reading was situated within the school classroom where video-clips of the actual events at Tian An Men Square, as well as historical texts with documentation of actual events, were juxtaposed with the reading of the literary text, Tim became immersed in extra-textual information which supported his belief in the truth of the story. The *content* of the novel cannot, it seems, be considered in the absence of its reading *context.*

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[17] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 13.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 26.

[20] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

[21] These transformations are: 1. mode: inserting modal auxiliaries such as *must, might, could, would;* 2. Intention: the act is directly embedded in its intention: *John plans to commit a crime;* 3. Result: Presuppose intent but leave open the question of how: *John succeeds in committing a crime.;* 4. Manner: Subjectifies the act and creates an attitude that modifies the action's intention: *John is anxious to commit a crime;* 5. Aspect: A form of time marking that points to the progress of the task: *John is beginning to commit a crime;* 6. Status: Opens the possibility that there was a wish to, a possibility, an accusation that could have led to a crime: *John is not committing a crime.*

With the concept of the subjunctive, Bruner takes up the concept of the *formulative* function of language offered by the literary text and re-describes it as an understanding of the way in which the actual structure of the text contributes to the literariness that we experience when reading it. Drawing from Wolfgang Iser's formulation of the need for "gaps" in the literary text,[22] complemented by Roland Barthes' belief that the reader needs to "write" the text that is read,[23] Bruner suggests that the "literariness" of a text is closely linked to the way in which the text is able to formulate discourse systems which "recruit the reader's imagination"[24] facilitating the kind of performance that leads to meaning-making activities.

But is it really as straightforward as Bruner has suggested? Is the difference between the literary and the non-literary merely a matter of syntactic transformations which encourage readers to subjunctivize? Is the distinction between the literary and the non-literary *really* hinged on things such as the *formulative* or the *subjunctive,* or is it possible that there is absolutely nothing inherent in the literary work which would distinguish it from other works? "Of course there is a difference!" might be our immediate response. Most of us have felt a "difference" in our reading of a poem by Robert Frost, a novel by Margaret Atwood, or a short story by Edgar Allen Poe. The experience of reading these is not the same as our reading of a newspaper or the instructions for programming our VCR. The question remains: How might we characterize this differential reading experience?

Efferent, Aesthetic

Louise Rosenblatt explains this phenomenon as the difference between "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading. For her, the efferent is related to the instrumentally communicative function of language, while the aesthetic emerges from the experience of being drawn into language which fulfills a formulative function.[25]

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[22] As first described in *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). For Iser, the literary text exists "primarily as a means of communication, while the process of reading is basically a kind of dyadic interaction" (p. 66). In reading, the reader is required to reduce the indeterminacies that exist between the text and the reader, and the text and reality, and to build a situational frame which will encompass her/himself and the text. Through the structuring and ordering of signifiers, the author creates a text in which the potential reader is to interact. The fulfillment of this interaction occurs when the reader applies his/her reading skills to the already constructed language of the text. The situation is not found in the text, but rather in the interaction between reader and text. If the author has been skillful, the reader will be able to use his or her reading skills to engage in the text in a manner which facilitates that sort of construction. The reader, then, must carefully follow the textual clues in order to form the sort of horizontal reality that is derived from the interaction of his or her understanding of the text combined with her or his own experiences. The text, then, establishes a guiding framework for this interaction, one in which "author and reader are to share the game of imagination" in which the text becomes "a set of governing rules" (p. 108).

[23] In *S/Z* (New York: Wang and Hill, 1974), Barthes argues that the literary text, if it is to summon up the reader's imagination in a way which becomes productive rather than merely re-productive, must be "writerly" rather than "readerly." For Barthes the writerly text is one which requires that readers engage in indeterminacy filling constructions, while the readerly are those which are over-determined, didactic, allowing little space for the reader.

[24] Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds,* 25.

[25] Rosenblatt was the first the first literary critic and reading theorist to acknowledge the importance of the relationship which is developed between reader and literary text. Implicit within her theory is the importance of re-symbolization on a variety of different levels. As the reader interacts with the literary text she or he goes through a transactive process of re-symbolizing his or her own thoughts with those presented in the text. In this sense, reading, for Rosenblatt, is a form of cultural re-writing, a purposeful construction and reconstruction of thoughts and ideas which emerge from the transaction between

Her two major works *Literature as Exploration*[26] and *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*[27] have demonstrated an immense scholarship and deep understanding of the transactional relationship between reader and literary text, which, in her words, "is basically between the reader and what he senses the words as pointing to."[28]

Using her own experiences as a teacher of English literature, Rosenblatt carefully develops a theory of literary reading which situates meaning-making as a conversation — a dialogue between reader and text — which is always situated temporally, spatially, and contextually within the reader's lived experience. This work has been crucial for reconceptualizing the way in which literary texts are read (and therefore the way they should be taught), and to this day forms the foundation for many reader-response theories and practices in the English language arts classroom.

For our purposes, it seems fruitful to ask whether Tim's experience with the novel *Forbidden City* was an aesthetic experience or an efferent one. Rosenblatt coined the world "efferent" from the Latin *effere* meaning "to carry away" in order to distinguish between reading for conceptual knowledge and reading as a lived experience. She suggests that the literary work of art invites readers into an experience that leads to a transaction which is more aesthetic than efferent, and suggests that it is the structure of the text and the intentions of the reader which produce this effect.[29] Therefore, it is possible that Tim's inability to distinguish the historically verifiable from the invented fictive led to a reading which was largely efferent rather than aesthetic. Of course, given the fact that it is the efferent reading that is valued in most other school subjects (and, it could be argued in many English classrooms) it is not surprising that Tim resisted the aesthetic reading within the context of the classroom.[30]

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reader and text. Although she does not explicitly align herself with the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger or Gadamer, it is clear that her theory of meaning-making is compatible with Heidegger's *Dasein* and Gadamer's insistence that coming to an understanding of this being can only occur through a dialectical hermeneutic where understanding of Self and Other occurs through questions that present themselves in conversation, for it was through Rosenblatt that the "conversation" between text and reader gained priority and prominence.

[26] Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938) written in the heyday of the new critical movement, was revolutionary in its alliance with the philosophy of John Dewey and the progressive education movement of the time. (see John Willinsky, *The New Literacy*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 99-104 for an excellent summary). Positing the relationship between reader and text as an exploration of possible worlds, Rosenblatt was prophetic in shifting authority from the author and the text and moving it into the interaction between reader and text. Theorizing that reading literature is a way in which young persons can learn to better understand and deal with an ever-changing and progressive world, Rosenblatt states that its purposes must be "To supply youth with the tools and knowledge necessary for a scientifically objective, critical appraisal of accepted opinion" and "to predispose the individual toward working out a basis for a more fruitful living" (p. 212). Rosenblatt's understanding of the reading of a work of literature as "an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (p. 32) was so antithetical to the new criticism of the day that it remained largely ignored by literary and curriculum theorists until its re-printing in 1968. It is likely more than coincidental that this re-printing followed closely on the heels of the Anglo-American seminar on the Teaching of English held in Dartmouth, New Hampshire in 1966, and the publication of John Dixon's (1967) report of this six week conference where a "growth" model vs. "skills" or "cultural transmission" model of English teaching was endorsed, hence authorizing an approach to literature reading and teaching which was more interactive than that promoted by the new criticism and more in line with Rosenblatt's theorizing.

[27] Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

[28] Ibid., 21.

[29] Although she makes it quite clear, in her comments on the valuation of "speed-reading" a novel: "This would be only efferent reading. The text would simply not have been read as a novel, as a literary work of art." (1978, 25). Similarly "aesthetic" moments are acknowledged to occur everywhere: "[W]e need to recognize that if there is the aesthetic element in day-to-day life, it depends on a certain shift of interest, attention, or awareness from he purely practical or referential to the immediately experienced qualitative aspects" (p. 37).

[30] Interestingly, in her own discussions and responses to her first reading of the novel, Anna, his teacher, also seemed pre-occupied with the efferent. In her case, however, her efferent reading seemed to be conditioned by the fact that she wished to use this novel as the basis for a teaching unit. Although in later conversations emerging from a group reading of the novel, she demonstrated a more personal involvement with the book, emerging largely from some parallels between the characters' political struggles and her own wranglings with political oppression in her school, the

Therefore, although Rosenblatt's idea of the difference between efferent and aesthetic reader-text transactions has been important and useful, it still seems to fall a bit short of accounting for the particular character of the literary text that is most likely to invoke the literary imagination of the reader. And, if the literary cannot be characterized, the experience of efferent or aesthetic readings must be reduced to reader intention and/or conditions of reading rather than anything which might exist in the text itself.

This leads us to a bit of a turn in the road. Is it possible that literariness does *not* exist in the text, but can only be described in the culturally conditioned way in which the reader approaches and interacts with the text? Wolfgang Iser reminds us that, like art which has been torn from its functions and placed in museums as something autonomous, that which is culturally valued as the literary text is canonized into collections meant to demonstrate some free-standing literary heritage that is to be passed on from generation to generation.[31] Could it be, then, that the literary text is merely that which is valued highly enough to be preserved, anthologized, or canonized? Or might we still be able to identity some transcendent literary quality, something *essential,* an *essence* to which "literariness" can be reduced?

Play, Game

In *Truth and Method* philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer explains the way in which our present situation and our present consciousness are always at the end-point of the world which has preceded us, and how we, acting within the present moment, are simultaneously affected by, and affect this historical presence. It is precisely this idea of the "historically effected" nature of our consciousness which comes into play when reading, for in the act of reading, we must work to initiate a fusion of the text as the end-point of its own history, our own history of past interactions in the world, and the present moment of the act of reading.[32]

By tracing of the history of aesthetics, Gadamer helps us to understand that the work of art (including the literary work of art) is a coincidence of form and meaning that cannot be reduced to a concept. At the same time, human interaction with art forms is an *experience* and, as such, has a subjective function. Because art must be perceived in some way (seen, heard, felt), it can never be reduced to an essence since perception itself can never be pure. Gadamer suggests that "to do justice to art, aesthetics must go beyond itself and abandon the 'purity' of the aesthetic," which means that what we know as art can never be reduced to an essence of art.[33] Like perception itself, art, in order for it to exist at all, must always be imbued with meaning.[34]

For Gadamer, then, the literary work of art, like any art form, only exists in the experiencing of it. This does not mean that anything can be deemed art. Gadamer believes that any art form is an historical interpretation — an artifact — which, like the human subjects who produce it, and later interact with it, is the product of a set of historical circumstances. Art, like all other historical artifacts, carries with it the trace of the culture of origin — the trace of the human minds, intentions and conditions which shaped it. The literary work or art, then, like any art form, must be culturally announced as such. It is when it is *announced* as an art form that the reader knows she or he is to interact with it as an art form. Does this mean, then, that *anything* can be considered a literary work of art? Gadamer would suggest not:

"efferent" always remained foregrounded in her comments.

[31] Iser discusses this in *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 204-205.

[32] In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer states that "understanding is, essentially, an historically effected event" (p. 300). For him, this meant that all of the traditions of the past (as carried in the language we learn) pre-conditions and effects our present consciousness. Gadamer suggests that historical effect means "that we cannot extricate ourselves from it in such a way that the past becomes completely objective for us....We are always situated in history....I mean that our consciousness is determined by a real historical process, in such a way that we are not free to simply juxtapose ourselves to the past" (as cited in Shaun Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 90.

[33] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 88.

[34] In his book *A Reading of 'Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), Joel Weinsheimer explains that Gadamer began with a discussion of aesthetics because he realized that "An aesthetics that would be more adequate to the full scope of art must surpass the pure aesthetic judgment — in Gadamer's view and Kant's ... Gadamer does not transcend aesthetics by viewing it from above; rather, in his interpretation of Kant, aesthetics transcends itself. There can be no free play of imagination if understanding are thus reaffirmed as the surplus by which art exceeds pure aesthetic judgment" (p. 83).

> The difference between a literary work of art and any other texts is not... fundamental. It is true that there is a difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose, and again between the language of poetic prose and that of "scientific" or "scholarly" prose. These differences can certainly also be considered from the point of view of literary form. But the essential difference between these various "languages" obviously lies elsewhere: namely in the distinction between the claims to truth that each makes.[35]

Gadamer explains that whereas non-literary forms of writing are meant to instrumentally convey a truth which has some verifiable correspondence, the literary work of art does not. Instead, it invites the reader into an experience of reading which is like the playing of a game. Therefore, the experience in the work of art is not given; it is meant to emerge from the "game" and the reader's participation in the game.[36] The literary work of art, for Gadamer, only exists in the reader's participation with it — in the playing of the "game" which is framed by the literary text, but dependent on the reader (player) for the work to be realized.

This has structural consequences, for it means that the literary work of art must have the capacity to allow various players (readers) to engage with it at various times. It is the detachability of the artwork from any particular subject (author, reader, spectator) that Gadamer suggests transforms a text into a form or structure which has the quality of being repeatable. The possibility for repeatability of the literary work of art is not to be found in the actual words which comprise it, but rather the way in which these are structured which allows the readers to keep changing while the text is still the same. This structural quality means that the "play" (i.e., game between text and reader) is able to be repeated by various readers and various contexts. Unlike non-literary texts, the literary text's truth value does not lie in the ability of the reader to extract meaning from the text (which corresponds to verifiable aspects in the world), but rather to generate an interpretation of the text (which simultaneously involves an interpretation of the reader). Gadamer helps us to understand that "when we interpret the artwork, we interpret ourselves; and as the work comes into interpretation, so we come to be also."[37]

Can looking at the interaction between reader and text as a game that is played help us to understand Tim's confusion about the literariness of *Forbidden City*? Is it possible that Tim simply does not understand that his interaction is meant to be playful and game-like? Could it be that the book does not clearly announce itself as a literary text? Perhaps the most interesting question might be concerned with what Tim would have thought had he *not* known of the events of Tian An Men Square and had read the book "as if" all of the events had been concocted by the author. Would he still have been confused? Would the reading have been more playful?

It seems likely that some of Tim's confusion emerges from the extra-textual information provided by his teacher. Although the book was "announced" as fiction, and certainly conformed to well-known, culturally established conventions of "literariness," it was read amid video tapes and written accounts of the actual events at Tian An Men Square. It could be argued that these extra-textual experiences prevented Tim from "playing" in the text, and from being "played by" the text in the same way that he might have had there not been these influences. This, however, seems too tidy, too neat an interpretation. Although it would be convenient to suggest that context alone distracted Tim from the literariness of the text, it would seem more likely that there were other factors which also contributed to his apparent confusion.

Re-Mark, Iterability

Post-structural literary theory may be of assistance here, for most post-structural theorists agree that we are always interacting with a constantly evolving, unfixable, playful language. Jacques Derrida,[38] for example, believes that the literary text is not the site of meaning but rather a form which empties out meaning while at the same time remaining potentially meaningful. In other words, the literary text does not *contain* a transcendent core of meaning, but rather has a *repeatable singularity* that depends on a structural openness to new contexts. Derrida suggests that

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[35] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 163.

[36] Because this concept deals more with the experience of reading, than the condition of the literary work of art itself, I will elaborate on these ideas in chapter three in my discussion of the experience of reading.

[37] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 97-98.

[38] Derrida, *Acts of Literature*.

> There is no essence or existence of literature. If you proceed to analyze all the elements of a literary work, you will never come across literature itself, only some traits which it shares or borrows, which you can find elsewhere too, in other texts, be it a matter of the language, the meanings, or the referents. ...And even the convention which allows a community to come to an agreement about the literary status of this or that phenomenon remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision.[39]

Acknowledging his scholarly work as existing somewhere between literary theory and philosophy, Derrida suggests that — in the Western world at least — the literary text "implies that license is given to the writer to say everything he wants to or everything he can, while remaining shielded, safe from all censorship, be it religious or political."[40] The cultural value of the literary text, then, is related to the valuing of the concept of democracy, in that both call for a space for the voices of participants in either democratic or literary processes. As such, there is not a text which is literary in *itself* but rather there are in the texts "features which call for a literary reading and recall the convention, institution, or history of literature."[41] There is, therefore, a culturally pre-determined literary *functioning* of an experience of "literariness" rather than anything essentially intrinsic to the literary text. Attempts to reduce the literary text to an essence in terms of meaning, content, form, signifier, truth, or representation Derrida refers to as "reductions and misconstruings" of literature as "thematism, sociologism, historicism, psychologism."[42]

Derrida suggests, however, that in order for the literary text to be interpretable it must in some way conform to a genre, as well as a set of generalized conventions which guide the reader. However, this does not mean that *meaning* is directed by the conventionalized form the text takes. Like Gadamer, Derrida suggests that the meaning can only occur when the reader becomes purposefully engaged with the text. The text, however, must be "marked" in advance by what Derrida calls the *re-mark* which is not a feature of the text itself, but rather the ability for the text, along with the reader, to evoke a *rupture*—a breaking free of the boundaries of language and experience. The literary text, then, at its most powerful, is able to move beyond the *mark* on the page, or the act of *marking* (adding to) the experience of reader: it has the ability to *re-mark* — to transform. In other words, in re-marking, both the reader and the text are altered for having been involved the act of reading. The idea of *re-marking* according to Attridge, is

> a permanent possibility in all texts, all signs, but literature has the capacity to stage its operation with unusual forcefulness and to produce unusual pleasure in doing so. ...A text in which the re-mark, and the relation between singularity and generality, are staged with haunting power is, to that extent, "literary."[43]

It is the ability for the literary text to evoke in the reader a singular meaning from the common text which Derrida names the *iterability* of the literary text. Although *iterability* occurs elsewhere besides literary texts,[44] according to Derrida, it is most powerfully evoked within the well-wrought literary text. It is the idea of *iterability* which explains the ability for the literary text to be read by various readers over various contexts and temporal periods in a way which is "singular" to each reader (i.e. they are able to derive personal meaning from it) and, at the same time, retain the historical trace of its origins. Iterability means, for example, that although I will never be able to retrieve an "original, intentional" meaning of the literary text (as promoted by theorists such as E.D. Hirsch[45]), I will be able to generate a "singular" meaning which is at the same time situated within an historical trace in the literary text. Derrida writes:

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[39] Ibid., 73.

[40] Ibid., 37.

[41] Ibid., 44.

[42] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1981), 70.

[43] Derek Attridge, in his introduction to *Acts of Literature*, 16.

[44] Such as in the judicial system where the meaning of the law is always considered in relation to the *specific* application of the law and at the same time the *general* meaning of the law.

[45] Especially in his book *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

> To say that marks or texts are originally iterable is to say that without a simple origin, and so without a pure originarity, they divide and repeat themselves immediately. They thus become capable of being rooted out at the very place of their roots. Transplantable into a different context, they continue to have meaning and effectiveness.[46]

For Derrida, the reader does not exist before the work, but is invented by the work, through her or his engagement with the work. It is the *iterable* character, the ability to mark and *re-mark* which permits this invention. However, this is not to be understood as a "natural" phenomenon. Derrida suggests that this continual invention and re-invention of the reader will only occur "if s/he is willing to countersign,"[47] for it is in the countersigning that the reader agrees to become part of the re-marking process. Derrida's descriptions of *re-marking* and *iterability* point to the need for us, as human subjects, to engage with texts that permit some sort of self-interpretation, some form of "re-invention" which Heidegger has told us is the essence of human existence.[48]

Interestingly, in interviews with a number of students after their class reading of *Forbidden City,* I discovered that it was only when they were able to forget the historicity of the text and engage in the experience of the plot with the invented characters were they able to articulate their own re-invention process. Although the concept of democracy and freedom was addressed in extra-textual information provided by their teacher, they seemed to become more powerful concepts when readers discussed them in terms of their experience of living alongside the characters in the novel.[49] This became particularly evident in my conversations with Tim, for even though he remained reluctant to admit the invented fictionality of the characters presented in the novel, it became evident that his "relationship" with the lives of these characters had helped him to more deeply understand the lived experience of another culture:

> I can understand how Alex would seem so different to his friends after he came back home. I mean, even *I* feel different after reading the book, and I didn't go anywhere!

It seems that even though Tim was unsure about the book's status as a work of fiction, he was still able to become re-marked. The question remains, however, of whether it was the book itself that facilitated the experience of feeling *different*, or whether it was the extra-textual and post-reading activities in the classroom which facilitated it.

Both Gadamer and Derrida would like suggest that is not possible, nor even desirable to attempt to make this distinction, since, like all action in the world, the reading of the literary text is always an historically effected act that must occur within a lived context. Therefore, the interactions that Tim has in the classroom, like any other interactions he might have will, of course, affect how he feels about his relationship with any text. At the same time, they would also agree that there is a particular and specific *experience* of reading the literary text. And so, although concepts like *play, game, re-mark,* and *iterability* do not, in the end, nail down once and for all what we might mean when we invoke the word *literary,* they can help us to understand the complexity of the relation between reader and literary text. Most of all, they prevent us from saying too soon what the character of these texts might be, and that is important. For without the reader reading, there seems to be little sense or understanding of the literary text.

The Real, The Fictive, The Imaginary

Is it possible that the character of the literary can only be announced alongside an understanding of the act of reading?

Wolfgang Iser has been exceedingly helpful on this point, for he has suggested that we will never find the key to "literariness" in the absence of the act of reading. Over the past twenty years, his work has sought a phenomenological description and hermeneutic understanding of the experience of reading literary texts and has, to a large degree, helped us to more clearly understand the differential experiences of reading literary and non-literary texts.[50] Like Susanne Langer, Iser suggests that the author of the literary text takes elements from a familiar world and puts them together in an unfamiliar way. The unfamiliarity is, in part, derived from the fact that literary texts offer less determinacy than other texts. It is not the intention of the literary text to present a seamless real-world correspondence through the language which is selected, but rather, to present a disrupted world — a world which, in order to be made meaningful, depends upon the active participation of the reader. This, Iser suggests, is what constitutes the aesthetic response in the act of reading the literary text, for it is in the process of "indeterminacy filling" that the reader becomes removed from his or her real world into a world constructed through the reader-text interaction. A structural feature of the literary text, then, is the deliberate insertion of indeterminacy by the author. In fact, Iser suggests that

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[46] Derrida, *Acts of Literature,* 64.

[47] Ibid., 74.

[48] As explicated in his seminal work *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

[49] The students' teacher told me that the students seemed unable to understand the experience of living in a non-democratic country. Although they could recite clichés of democracy (equal opportunity, freedom of speech, etc.) they did not really seem to understand that embedded within democratic ideals were necessary constraints for individuals. At the same time, they found it virtually impossible to understand how one could not "choose" a career in Communist China. These ideas seemed to become much clearer for students after they had "lived through" the experience of reading the novel, which, one could suggest, points to the importance of the virtual in understanding the "real."

> Texts with ... minimal indeterminacy tend to be tedious, for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text, whose intention he himself has helped to compose as real. *For we generally tend to regard things that we have made ourselves as real.* And so, it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation.[51]

Upon examination, it is clear that the novel *Forbidden City* is not overly-determined. In fact, because the first half of the book is composed solely of journal entries written from the point of view of the main character, Alex, it is, at times, highly indeterminate and ambiguous. Because we need to rely upon Alex's journal entries for all our information about past and present events, about other characters and about motive, there is a great deal that the reader needs to "fill in" for him or herself. Why, for example, are Alex's parents divorced? Why is Alex living with his father? Although more information about Alex's family situation is given later in the book, it becomes up to the reader to engage in a great deal of "indeterminacy filling" in the first half and, generally speaking, throughout the book. This is certainly not the way an actual historical account of one person's experience of Tian An Men Square might have been written. It is unlikely, first of all, that "personal" details about family relationships would have been related at all, and even if they were, they would likely have only been mentioned to illuminate a particular historical event. In the historical text, the author attempts to "fill in" any gaps. Details, dates, times, and witnesses' accounts, all serve to make the text appear "seamless." Why, then, did Tim and some of his classmates feel that this text was so "real" for them? Is Iser correct in suggesting that the act of indeterminacy filling, because it is something that we construct ourselves, makes the fiction seem real? He writes:

> [T]he indeterminate elements of literary prose ... represent a vital link between text and reader. They are the switch that activates the reader into using his own ideas in order to fulfill the intentions of the text. This means that they are the basis for a textual structure in which the reader's part is already incorporated. In this respect, literary texts differ from those that formulate a concrete meaning or truth. Texts of the latter kinds are, by their very nature, independent of any individual reader, for the meaning or truth that they express exists independently of any reader participation. But when a vital element of a text is reader participation, it is forced to rely on the individual reader for the realization of a possible meaning or truth. The meaning is conditioned by the text itself, but only in a form that allows the reader himself to bring it out.[52]

In order for *Forbidden City* to become meaningful for Tim — in order for it to seem *real* — it was necessary for his imagination to be invoked. For it is only by invoking the *imagination* that indeterminacy filling is possible. For Tim, indeterminacy filling meant imagining what it would be like to live with a father, for his father had died when he was a baby. For his classmate, Gina, indeterminacy filling meant imagining what it would be like to live with her divorced father and his new wife instead of her mother. It seems, then, that Iser has identified the most important structural aspect of the literary text: the spaces of indeterminacy, as opened up by selections and combinations from the "real" world by the author, allow the imagination to be invoked. This imaginative response, it is important to understand, is not diffuse; it is conditioned by what is given in the literary text.

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[50] Beginning with *The Implied Reader*, (1975), *The Act of Reading* (1978), *Prospecting* (1989), and *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993), all published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

[51] Iser, *Prospecting*, 10, emphasis added.

[52] Ibid., 28-29.

The reader, however, *must be notified* about how she or he is to interact with the text, for it is not only the literary text which contains indeterminacy. The directions to my VCR machine, for example, seem to contain many indeterminacies, as did the calculus problems which I encountered in my high school mathematics class. However, these kinds of indeterminacies are not dealt with in the same way as those found in the literary text, for I do not feel that I can simply "imagine" what might occur in these spaces. I do not feel that I can "make up" information that is not given in the VCR directions or in the calculus problem. These differential responses, Iser suggests, are culturally conditioned. Sets of directions and math problems are meant to "tell" not to "invite," therefore it is important for us to become more attentive to the differences between these texts and "literary" texts.

According to Iser, it is essential that the literary text *announces* itself as such. The fictive that has been created must be unmasked as a fictive, for without the unmasking, the *fictive* text may be mistaken for the *non-fictive* text which, of course, would dramatically alter the way in which the reader engages with it. This unmasking can occur in the culturally agreed-upon forms that literature may take, or, if these are not clear, they are publicly announced by the author as a literary art form.[53] In any case, the most significant difference between the fictive of the literary text and other fictives in our lives (images of sports heros, political figures, rock stars, for example) is that the former must be unmasked as a fictive in order for it to function while the latter must not be.

Furthermore, although the literary text appears to resist the course of time, this is not because it represents transcendent, eternal values, but rather because its structure continually allows the reader to place him- or herself within the world of the announced fictive. It is the deliberate repositioning of selected aspects of the world by the author amid deliberate structures of indeterminacy which allows the *play*, the *re-mark*, and/or the *iterability* that characterizes the reader's engagement with literary texts. These structures, over the course of history, have been developed in order to live alongside, yet separate from other forms of discourse.

It is apparent, then, that literariness cannot be determined by features or functions of the text alone. Rather, "literariness" emerges from a combination of these as conditioned by the historically specific intentions of the author's selections of the real world as represented within the contextually specific conditions of the reader's engagement with these. Iser helps us to understand that

> Literary texts contain a range of signals to denote that they are fictive. These have become significant through particular, historically varying conventions shared by author and public. Thus the signals do not invoke fictionality as such, but conventions which form the basis of a kind of contract between author and reader the terms of which identify the text not as discourse but as enacted discourse.[54]

As opposed to interactions with the real world, however, the reader's engagement with the literary text cannot be perceived through the senses but only through the imagination. When the fictive nature of a text is unmasked, and the reader understands that she must work to overcome indeterminacy that has been conditioned by the author, the imagination is invoked. It is the conditioned imagination that leads to the experience of "boundary crossing" where the reader, through his or her engagement with the literary text, experiences a world which outstrips any real-world correspondence that she may know.

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[53] Such as the conceptual literary art of Jenny Holzer who rents electronic signs in places such as Times Square in New York City, and flashes across the screen reflections such as "Fathers often use too much force," "Money creates taste," or "Go where people sleep and see if they're safe." Discussed in John Willinsky *The New Literacy* (New York, Routledge, 1990).

[54] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, 11-12.

It is important, therefore, to understand that what we perceive as literary emerges from a dialectical relationship — through the act of reading — between the *real*, the *fictive*, and the *imaginary*. As a product of the author's selections and re-combinations of details from the real world, embedded within culturally agreed upon *fictive* forms, the *imaginary* is invoked. The reader, then, is able to participate in these mutually intended imaginings without any of the consequences of a real-world engagement with them. Even so, because these engagements are experiences, they become woven into the fabric of the reader's world, and it is thus that we see how the imaginary weaves itself back into the real. Given this understanding, it becomes clear why we often value our engagements with literary texts, for although they are not the same as encounters with expository texts, or with more tacit face-to-face experiences in the world, they are significant.

The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Literary Text

My own pre-occupation, in this chapter, with naming and identifying the character of the literary text is an example of the human desire for meaning, for understanding. Heidegger believed that to study understanding was to study the essence of human existence itself, for it is a necessary function of humanness that understanding be sought. Following Heidegger, Gadamer has insisted that it is not sufficient to characterize Being as understanding; for understanding itself, he claimed, is always situated between an historically effected consciousness and a wondering about what the future might hold. Therefore, Gadamer sought a philosophical hermeneutics which explored the conditions for the possibility for understanding. What makes it possible for human beings to understand their own being? What is the significance of reflecting upon and coming to an understanding of these conditions of understanding through language—a language which necessarily includes traces of the history of its prior condition?

By simply asking the question "What *is* the character of the literary text?" I have demonstrated my complicity in the modern philosophical project to determine an absolute, a foundation, an essence for what could be called "literary." This desire to *locate*, to determine *once and for all*, is precisely what eludes us in the project of defining the literary, for the literary does not live within the words, within the text, or within the reader. The literary, as Gadamer, Derrida and Iser have helped us to understand can only be found in the imaginative play which exists between a text and a reader. And although the forms and conventions which help us to distinguish literary texts from others are always and already historically effected, they are also always and forever altered through the functions they serve, the interpretations they are given, and the locally hermeneutic way in which they are enacted. The question, then, of what reading literary texts reveals *to* us is not nearly so interesting as the question of what reading them reveals *about* us. This idea is supported by Gadamer who suggests that

> There are no purely formal criteria that can claim to judge and sanction the formative level [of art] simply on the basis of its artistic virtuosity. Rather, our sensitive-spiritual existence is an aesthetic resonance chamber that resonates with the voices that are constantly reaching us, preceding all explicit aesthetic judgment.[55]

It is significant that Gadamer does not locate aesthetic consciousness in the "mind" but rather in the relational aspects of our existence in the world.[56] Curriculum theorist David Smith helps us to understand that, in the Western world at least, we have been trapped into believing that the mind is "the locale and arbiter of knowledge and experience"[57] and that it is through perception that the human subject is able to grasp reality and legitimate it through language. This valorization of consciousness, Smith suggests, "shapes curriculum decision-making as fundamentally a form of arbitration over the correctness or appropriateness of ideas ... as a judgment of the degree to which they 're-present' reality, and the truth of things as defined according to standards of orthodoxy such as science or communal tradition."[58] It is not surprising, then, that I would seek the "truth" of the literary, since the value of things in the modern Western world is often dependent upon determining the strength of their foundations.

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[55] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 8.

[56] Gadamer's use of the word "spiritual" here seems to refer to the importance of being tuned into the invisible connections between human subjects and their world.

[57] David Smith, "Hermeneutic Inquiry: The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," in *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, ed. Edmund C. Short (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 196.

[58] Ibid., 195-196.

Gadamer, however, reminds us that "The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable."[59] And so, perhaps the question, What *is* the character of the literary text? can be considered an appropriate beginning for an hermeneutic investigation into the pedagogical meaning of our relationships with literary texts. Perhaps it has been by traveling through the journey initiated by *this* question that I have come to understand that it is probably not the right question, since "what *is*" implies something fixed, something foundational. Curiously, however, it seems that the hermeneutic question — the question to which there is not an absolute, pre-determined, or a fixed answer — can be found within this question, for the word *is*, of course, announces a state of being. Therefore, through a simple syntactic maneuver we might ask instead: What is the *state of being* of the literary text? It seems that this is a question which *can* be answered, for it has become rather clear that the literary text is an historically effected form — a set of conventions which signals a contract between author and reader — which, when unmasked as such, invites the reader into a particular kind of relationship. The existence of the literary text, then, can never be defined by particular, fixed, pre-determined features, but can only be understood historically, culturally, referentially, and relationally.

The existential character of the literary text, as Iser has helped us to understand, is inextricable from the human being's capacity for the imaginative. However, somehow, in our commodified and technologized culture we have marginalized the imaginative to the "daydream," to something which is always secondary to the "real" business of day-to-day life. Nowhere is this more evident than in schools where the mark of a good student is her or his ability to keep his/her mind on task, to keep from daydreaming. Similarly, an effective teacher is able to promote this work ethic through a rigorous program of studies coupled with well-honed management skills. The imaginary is often relegated to the wasteland of arts and crafts classes, the Christmas play, the creative writing period, whereas real work is represented by problems of algebra, science experiments, and close readings of literary texts.

What is the importance of the imaginary? The Oxford English Dictionary can help us here:

> ***Imagine:*** To form an image of, represent. To picture oneself in imagination. To picture something not present to the senses. To consider, ponder, meditate, bethink oneself.
>
> ***Imagination:*** The power which the mind has of forming concepts beyond those derived from external objects. The creative faculty of the mind in its highest aspect, the power of framing new and striking intellectual conceptions; poetic genius.

Plato understood the power of the imagination, the power of poetic genius. Hence, his warning about poetics and poets.[60] The power of the imagination invoked by the poetic — the literary — is well-known by political dictators, by regimes of power which understand the subversiveness and danger of the poetically conditioned imagination. For to imagine, within the spaces opened up by the literary text, is not merely to imagine what might fill those spaces, but to imagine oneself as well. To imagine is to "bethink oneself," to meditate, to picture oneself in imagination. It is this human ability that leads to interpretation, to self-interpretation. This need for self-interpretation, in relation to our historically effected conscious presence in the world, is hermeneutic. It is the kind of questioning that emerges from our continual need to define and re-define ourselves in relation to our world and each other. And because our hermeneutic interpretations of our lived experience always includes thinking ahead to a future existence (what will happen tomorrow?), it becomes rather clear that hermeneutic understanding depends upon the imagination, for *all* prediction is imaginative work.

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[59] Hans-Georg Gadamer, ***Philosophical Hermeneutics***, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 13.

[60] In *The Republic*, Plato attacked art and the artist on two fundamental issues. In the first place, Plato not only viewed the artist as an imitator, he believed that the product of the artist's technique is an imitation of an imitation. The artist borrows his or her subject matter from another art, and moreover, is ignorant of the function of the art he or she copies. Secondly, Plato believed that the poet invoked the emotions in a dangerous way, making persons who should be controlled by reason mastered by passion.

Given the importance of the imagination to human interpretation, it is not surprising, in his discussion of the possibilities for hermeneutics in curriculum inquiry, that David Smith would suggest:

> The hermeneutic imagination works from a commitment to generativity and rejuvenation and to the question of how we can go on together in the midst of constraints and difficulties that constantly threaten to foreclose on the future.[61]

And, at the same time, it is precisely the hermeneutic imagination which makes possible the literary. The literary may be thought of as an agreed-upon collection of genres — of forms — that allow the human imagination to be invoked. These forms are marginalized and valorized at the same time; although we value the form, and value our engagement with them, we have had some difficulty accounting for their empirical value in our daily lives. That which is understood and recognized (announced) as literary gives permission for the human subject to imagine herself as "other" than the way she perceives herself (or is perceived) in the "real" world. It is the immersion into a constructed fictive, composed of re-positioned elements of the "real" that allows the imaginary to be conditioned in such a way that the world remains unfixable, undetermined.

And so, if we think back to Tim's insistence that *Forbidden City* is real and not fictional, we should be concerned. Not concerned about why he *thinks* that it is real but rather with why he should *want* it to be real. If we can agree that the retreat to the imaginary, through the constructed fictive of the literary text, is indeed a generative, hermeneutically important state of being, then why is it that Tim is not eager to enter into that realm? Why is it that he resists when his teacher insists that he must read this as a fiction? Moreover, why does his teacher feel that the reading of this literary text, in order to be understood, must occur amid her presentation of extra-textual material? Is it possible that the schooled context of reading is preventing Tim from accepting and accessing the fictive, and at the same time, the imaginative? Is it even possible for the *imaginative, subjunctive, aesthetic, formulative, iterable* reading to exist in a setting which valorizes and validates the *real, paradigmatic, efferent, communicative* one? Is it possible for the culturally announced forms of the literary to function in school settings in the way in which they must in order to perform their transformative work?

These are difficult, important questions, for they begin to address the issue of what it means for the literary imagination and the school curriculum to co-exist. Before they can be fully taken up, however, the nature of the reader's relationship with the literary text must be explored.

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[61] Smith, "Hermeneutic Inquiry: The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," 188-189.

Chapter Three

TRACING INTERTEXTUAL DESIRE

> My books begin with very small things — overheard conversations, or personal and historical details. You build the pieces over a period of time. Then you have to try to knit them all together in some way, and it becomes something very different from what you thought you were writing while you were writing it.
>
> Michael Ondaatje[1]

> I would suggest that the wise interpreter give way to delirium so that, out of his desire, the imaginary may join interpretive closure, thus producing a perpetual interpretive creative force.
>
> Julia Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis and the Polis*[2]

> The text you write must prove to me *that it desires me.*
>
> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*[3]

> She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

In the preceding excerpt from *The English Patient* the character Hana enters the novel knowing that her commitment to it — her relationship with it — will be rewarded. She will leave "full of sentences and moments" that become woven into her body. Such is the experience of immersion into the literary text, particularly works of prose fiction such as novels which have the capacity to sweep the reader into a web of words which are unlike those she is likely to find in her everyday life. As Iser helped us to understand in the preceding chapter, the literary text, if it is well-written, has the ability to invoke and condition the imagination of the reader, creating possible worlds that become part of the reader's experience of living.

It is clear that this experience of *relationship* with the literary text must be a pleasurable one, for it seems that the desire for one's children, one's friends, one's students to form relationships with them goes beyond the belief that reading is *good for them.* Although the reading of literary texts is promoted by some as a way in which to improve reading skills, to experience a particular cultural heritage, or to learn particular facts, it seems that all of these could be just as effectively learned through other experiences. No, it seems that those of us who have experienced what it is like to be *bound* to the literary text have found this a pleasurable experience. We desire it ourselves, and because pleasure is meant to be shared, we wish others to participate in similar experiences.

In this chapter I will explore the reader's developing relationship with the literary text. Because the quality of the reading relationship is, of course, influenced by the character and the form of the literary text, I will focus my discussion on readings of Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient.*[5] This novel has been selected for a number of reasons. First, it has been recognized as one of the finest works in the literary world,[6] and therefore as a valued cultural art form has particular relevance in a discussion of the reading relationship. Second, it is a text which was read and discussed by our teacher reading group. Our responses to this novel will serve to illuminate some of the theoretical points about the reading relationship. Third, the novel itself is infused with themes of reading, writing, and literary relationality which also become an important reference point in this discussion. Most interesting is the way in which Ondaatje has made the Greek writer Herodotus' work, *The Histories*,[7] a mediating text for relations among and between the characters in the novel. Because I feel that this provides important theoretical scaffolding for my own ideas about the reading relationship, I will start with a brief "history" lesson, followed by an exploration of the *significance* of reading relationships within the ecology of human lived experience.

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[1] Excerpt from a CBC interview with Eleanor Wachtel, as reprinted in her book *Writers and Company* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 56.

[2] From her essay "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 307.

[3] From *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: The Noonday Press, 1975), 6, original emphasis.

[4] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 12.

[5] In *Prospecting,* Iser suggests that over the past two hundred years the reader has had to assume greater responsibility for the construction of meaning: "The author-reader relationship, as developed in the eighteenth-century novel, has been a constant factor in narrative prose and is still in evidence, even though the author seems to have disappeared and the reader to be deliberately excluded from comprehension.... [T]oday's reader is expected to strive for himself to unravel the mysteries of a sometimes strikingly enigmatic composition. This development reflects the transformation of the very idea of literature, which seems to have ceased to be a means of relaxation and

Marking Boundaries

> In this book, the result of my inquiries into history, I hope to do two things: to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of the Asiatic peoples; secondly, and more particularly, to show how the two races came into conflict.
>
> Herodotus, *The Histories*[8]

It is well known that the idea of writing books, particularly stories, appeared only recently in the history of humanity. Before that, people had developed spoken language and had come to use it for telling stories which, in large part, were meant to preserve knowledge. Stories, as kept alive by an oral tradition became a *commonplace* for cultural knowledge. Gradually, this mode of storytelling adopted various specific syntactic devices which served two functions: first, they allowed "stories" to remain separate from everyday discourse; second, they provided structures which helped persons memorize the stories so that they might be passed from generation to generation.

In his book *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong[9] makes important distinctions between literate and oral cultures, suggesting that print literacy significantly alters the way in which cultures are organized. He explains that in pre-print cultures, knowledge, beliefs and traditions are located in narrative stories which are passed on from generation to generation. Interpretation and revision of cultural knowledge is continual, and occurs naturally in the modifications which are made to songs, poetry, myths and legends that are passed on through an oral tradition. By conceptualizing cultures as interactive systems which are organized around the use and structure of language, Ong helps us to understand that situating important cultural knowledge within orally transmitted stories affects, in profound ways, the manner of interaction among people. The most obvious consequence is that there needs to be a continued dialogue between the older and the younger generations, since it is only through conversation and shared storytelling that the wisdom can be passed. In this sense, storytelling facilitates an important pedagogical relation which is critical to the coherence of the cultural fabric. There is inscribed within oral cultures an ethic of pedagogical caring for which all adults assume some responsibility. Additionally, because the stories are continually updated, each storytelling is hermeneutic; each is an interpretation of what has been told by one's forebears.[10] It seems, then, that the pedagogy of storytelling simultaneously supports ongoing cultural preservation and cultural revision.

In Ancient Greece some stories of this type became highly rhythmic, taking on a form that Aristotle called "poetics" and which we still refer to as "poetry."[11] In Greece, as elsewhere, poets were those who were known as specially gifted and trained in reciting the traditional stories in

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even luxury, making demands now on the capacity for understanding because the world presented seems to have no bearing on what the reader is familiar with" (p. 17).

[6] *The English Patient* won the prestigious Booker Award (1992) as well as the prized Canadian award, The Governor General's Gold Medal for Literature (1992).

[7] There are numerous editions of Herodotus' *The Histories* in circulation. The one that I eventually used as a reference was the translation by Aubrey de Sélincourt (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1954).

[8] Ibid., 13.

[9] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

[10] Forms of this "oral tradition" still exist (although less and less) in unwritten "family stories" which are passed from one generation to the other. Oftentimes artifacts such as family heirlooms and photographs serve as "collecting places" for these stories.

[11] See Aristotle, *On Poetry and Music*, trans. S.H. Butcher (New York: Bobs-Merrill Co., 1948).

the traditional ways. An important quality of the effective storyteller was her or his ability to add new "verses" or new interpretations. The most famous of these stories are, of course, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. These and other epic poems were always memorized and passed on through the oral tradition, even though the advent of writing in Greece occurred some centuries prior (as early as 1400 B.C.). However, because record keeping was not necessary for most of the centuries prior to the ninth century B.C., writing was not much valued or used. It was only with the growth of trade that more systematic and formal systems of recording were required, rekindling an interest in the use and development of written forms of expression. Soon after, the Greeks began to extend their use of writing from commerce to the recording of the epic poems and stories. At the same time, they began keeping records of the events and winners at Olympic games, and of descriptions of the geographic features of towns and waterways of particular regions. Because these seemed to have little to do with the traditional topics of epic or narrative poetry and stories, they were recorded differently, in a more prosaic style. It is in the middle of this transition, from a largely oral culture into an emerging literate one, that Herodotus, commonly known as the "father of history," can be located.

Herodotus lived in the fifth century B.C. Although the exact dates are not known, sometime between 480-425 seems most likely.[12] This means that he was a boy at the time of the Persian Wars, which he took as the main theme for his book, which, in one of its first translations printed in 1584, was entitled *The Famous Hystory of Herodotus*. Although in later translations the title was changed to *The Histories*, the way in which these "histories" of the war between the Greeks and the Persians were written would suggest that the first title was perhaps more apt than the second, for it has been generally agreed that in addition to being the "father of history" Herodotus also provided one of the first models of prose literature in Europe. The general confusion about whether Herodotus' texts were historical or literary emerged from the fact that unlike previous attempts at keeping written historical records which largely took the form of lists of dates, locations, and specific occurrences with little attention given to the possible relations between these and the persons involved in them, Herodotus attempted a more full-bodied history. Rather than merely chronicling specific facts, he was more interested in the human relationships which led to particular events, and, at the same time, the way in which particular events influenced human behavior and relationships.

It is important to understand that in Herodotus' time the Greek word *historie* signified all intellectual pursuits — scientific, mathematical, aesthetic and historical. For Herodotus, to be an historian was to be an inquirer. Inquiry meant an active pursuit of data, gathering of stories, learning about causes of events, and rendering visible and explicit the relationships between them. His "history," then, of the events leading to and including the Persian Wars was meant to be an interpretation of his inquiries. It could be argued that Herodotus' *Histories* is a hermeneutic study in its most philosophically contemporary form, for he sought not merely facts, but an understanding of the conditions that made possible the interpretation of emerging events. Most of all, Herodotus sought *understanding* of the human relationships which he seemed to feel contained the truth of historical events. For this reason, he was no mere chronicler of events: he was an historian who gathered the accounts of many people and who took these stories, along with descriptions of their lands, their observable actions, their customs and traditions, their inventions, myths, romantic tales, and wove this information into a highly complex story of a civilization.

Why would Herodotus become famous as "the father" of modern history? Surely "history" is meant to be a recording of the facts, not some literary embellishment of them! According to his explicators[13] it is precisely the "embellishment" for which he is recognized, for it was Herodotus who was the first to go beyond the citing of facts to the important excavating of the social, political, cultural, interpersonal and relational *conditions* which supported any identified fact. Although not formally recognized as such, it may be argued that Herodotus was the first to understand that all human events are the result of Husserl's notion of human intentionality; that is, that all human consciousness and action *aims* at something.[14] *The Histories*, then, might be seen as one of the first systematic excavations of human intentionality — a hermeneutic inquiry into the conditions necessary to understand the relationships between particular events.

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[12] No-one is sure of the dates. I have chosen these from a span suggested by John Gould in his explication of *The Histories* [*Herodotus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989)] and Abrey de Sélincourt's introduction to his translation of *The Hisotories* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1954).

[13] Ibid.

Therefore, although The *Histories* are not thought of as chronicles of events exactly *as they happened*, they have been valued for the richness of detail about Greek culture which they contain. Like the epic poems which preceded them, *The Histories* became a collecting place for important cultural knowledge. As situated within a constructed sequence of events by characters selected by Herodotus, *The Histories* shows more than any other known text before it the human importance ascribed to hermeneutic *interpretation*. From Herodotus we learn that history is embodied in individuals; in the relationships between them; in the *particulars* of human experience, intentionality and interaction. History is not merely an accounting of events, but an accounting of human *desire*. Doing history, for Herodotus, meant attempting to render visible the largely invisible features of humanity — the invisible desires and relations that bind human subjects. History was an investigation of *boundaries* — of that which is *bound* and *binds*. Herodotus was interested in why one person felt *bound* to another, the *bounds* of human experience, the way in which a person or an entire civilization could *bound* from one situation to another, how cultures remained *bound* to their traditions, and yet, at the same time how they attempted to transgress those very bounds. History became an investigation into *boundaries*, and the way in which these are simultaneously held and transgressed. In effect, *The Histories* performed what it announced.

Contemporary versions of *The Histories* can be found in historical fiction made famous by authors such as James Michener. Like readers of *The Histories*, readers of novels by Michener do indeed learn something of the historical events depicted in the novel. I can remember, for example, after my reading of Michener's *Poland*[15] how delighted my father was that I *finally* seemed to know enough about the turbulent history of his native Poland for us to have conversations on the subject. Somehow, during these conversations, however, I forgot that what I knew about Polish history I had learned from a *literary* text. Although I had never shared the confusion that Tim had had about reading *Forbidden City*, my body had certainly been "filled with sentences." The reading of this literary text had altered the boundaries of my own knowledge about a country to which I was generationally bound. Did it matter that many of the characters, the specific events, the particular situations were invented, imagined by Michener? Not at all. And like most other readers, the experience of reading *Poland* has left a trace in me — a body-memory of reading that forms part of the collective memory of lived experience.

Commonplaces for the Self

> She picks up the notebook that lies on the small table beside his bed. It is the book he brought with him through the fire — a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus that he has added to, cutting and gluing pages from other books or writing in his own observations — so they are all cradled within the text of Herodotus.
>
> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[16]

With this passage from *The English Patient* we learn that the burned pilot, cared for by Hana, uses Herodotus' *The Histories* as a commonplace book — a book into which he has woven aspects of his own life, and which, at the same time, has become woven into him. The book is more than an artifact, more than a collecting place for ideas and thoughts he has had; it is a prosthetic device of sorts — an extension of his self.[17] Through his practice of re-reading parts of the book again and again over many years — of writing notes about his understandings of these readings, of gluing in pages from other books, and clippings from newspapers — the English patient shows us two things: First, that the sense of self cannot be contained by the body or by a mind, but relies, to a large extent, on "collecting" places outside of the body. Second, it helps us to understand that our engagements with books are dialogic; as readers we converse with books, and although we may not engage in the English patient's practice of writing and pasting things directly into the book, there is no doubt that as we read, we write. In this sense our interaction with books is relational.

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[14] Following his teacher Franz Brentano's work, Edmund Husserl formed the idea that consciousness is *intentional* or possesses *intentionality*. For Brentano and Husserl, intentionality indicated the way in which the human subject is inextricably connected to the world. Consciousness, then, is always *about* something, even if it is something which is imagined or remembered (i.e., something not immediately given in the world). All human consciousness, all human thinking and action, therefore is *intentional;* it is *about something*. All human activity and thinking is *oriented* to something and, at the same time, *directed* by that which orients it. For clear explications of Husserl's complex philosophy of the transcendent ego and intentionality see Max van Manen's *Researching Lived Experience* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990) and Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat's *Understanding Phenomenology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), particularly chapter 2, "Intentionality and Meaning," pp. 44-70.

[15] James Michener, *Poland* (New York: Random House, 1983).

[16] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 16.

[17] For the English patient, *The Histories* was both literally and figuratively a prosthetic device. Figuratively, is served as a "space" for ideas

For the English patient, *The Histories* becomes a text to which he is relationally bound. The relationship, however, is more than the absorption of "sentences" into the body, but also the reciprocal action of the physical infusion of aspects and artifacts of his self into the book. The book becomes a *mediating* text for the English patient. But as we learned in the last chapter, the *meaning* of the literary text is not to be found in the text or the reader, but rather in the engagement between text and reader. Therefore, it is probably more accurate to say that the place of mediation is not really in the text of *The Histories* itself, but rather in the *relationship* that is formed between the reader and the text. After this relationship is formed, the text merely *represents* (re-presents) the ever-evolving relationship between the English patient and this particular text.

Therefore, although the English patient calls *The Histories* his "commonplace" book, and although it is true that it forms a commonplace for ideas, thoughts, reflections and other artifacts, the actual commonplace is not to be found in the *book*, but rather in the *relationship* which he has with the book. This is an important point, for it helps us to understand the importance of commonplaces for the self that function as material extensions of the self. Herodotus knew this. And that is why he believed history must never be merely a recording of events, but rather a depiction of relational desire — a re-presentation of human action and interaction as fused by the human need for interpersonal relations. History could only be understood if the conditions — the relations which circumscribed and infused historical events — could somehow be depicted. Moreover, these needed to be presented in a way which would invite readers to participate, live with, and be *in relation* with/to the historical text. And so, like in the modern novel, Herodotus filled his history with characters, dialogue, adventure, gossip, and omniscient narration made coherent by a central plot and theme. It is the re-enactment of the historical plot with speaking, thinking and acting *characters* who are depicted *in relation* to one another that provides the semiotic space into which the reader enters.

Like the English patient who finds a commonplace within his relationship with *The Histories*, Anna, a high school English teacher, describes her experience of reading *The English Patient:*

> I feel like I'm sitting on the bed between Hana and the English patient, listening to them reading. I'm not one of them, and I'm not really myself either. I'm like a shadow that exists in their world.

By presenting the reader with dialogue punctuated with omniscient commentary, the author creates a text which allows the reader to be taken below the surface of action and event. This becomes the structural key to allowing Anna to function as a "shadow" in the text — what Geoff Fox has called the "Dark Watcher."[18] It is within this human-literary text relationship that can be located a "commonplace" for the self. Just as Hana and the English patient establish a relationship through the reading of novels together, Anna develops a particular relationship with a novel by reading about their experience of reading. In the reading it is neither "his" nor "her" experience, but becomes rather a *shared*

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developed both in his "real world" and in his imagination. This is how most of us use literary texts; they become "cognitive prosthesis" for the "extra" we cannot hold in our own minds. For the English patient, however the book became a prosthetic device in a more literal way, since his extensive burns left his body more or less dead; the book became a bodily extension of his very-much alive mind.

[18] Geoff Fox, "Dark Watchers: Young Readers and Their Fiction," *English in Education, 13,* no 1, (1979). The concept of the "Dark Watcher" emerged from an interview which Geoff Fox had with one reader who, in discussing her interaction with a novel, positioned herself as "stand[ing] apart, watching from the shadows" (p. 32). In his analysis of this comment, Fox theorizes that the reader is not merely incidental to the story, but "is the power, not the text: her sensitivities are playing upon the novel and without her the story could not develop" (p. 32).

experience mediated by the relationship between reader and text.

Once the relationship is established, it exists as part of the reader's world and sometimes functions as a mediating space in which readers negotiate other aspects of their lives. The relationship, then, between the reader and the literary text as the *commonplace* is something that we need to examine in greater detail. What is the significance of this relationship? How do these reading relationships become positioned among interpersonal relationships? What effect does one seem to have on the other?

Searching for the Trace

> Caravaggio watches Hana, who sits across from him looking into his eyes, trying to read him, trying to figure the flow of thought the way his wife used to do. He watches her sniffing him out, searching for the trace.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[19]

How can we know of minds other than our own?

Although Caravaggio had known Hana when she was a child, the intervening years had erased the significance of that knowledge. Hana is no longer a child; she has taken on the body and the mind of a woman. She is no longer merely an extension of her parents. "What she was now was what she herself had decided to become....He could hardly believe his pleasure at her translation."[20] To come to know Hana again — to understand the translation — Caravaggio needs to "read" her. But first, of course, he must learn the code. Hana knows this; she knows that he wants to peer inside her mind, to know what thoughts are in it, to know what she thinks of him. And yet, for the moment, all he can do is study her face, look into her eyes — windows, it is said, into the soul.

But eyes are also mirrors — two way mirrors. They become an opening which allows the world to enter the body for interpretation, commonly known as a "mirroring" of the world. The surface of the eye, however, also functions as a reflector. As Hana watches Caravaggio study her, she sees not only him, but herself. When I look into your eyes, I do not see into your mind. I see myself. Am I reading *you* when I look into your eyes? Or am I reading *myself*? Is it possible that I am in you and you are in me? Searching for the trace, it seems, is complicated. Often, while seeking the other we locate ourselves.

Prior to the war, Caravaggio was an accomplished thief. Because these skills were useful in a war where surveillance of enemy activity was required, Caravaggio became a spy — a very good one. What makes a good spy? It would seem that the most important quality would be the ability to create the conditions necessary to access "secret" information while remaining unnoticed, anonymous. Paradoxically, to learn some*thing* secret, you often need to know some*one*. Locating information, therefore, often requires entering into relations with someone. In order to retain anonymity, however, an efficient entry and clean escape is required. This was Caravaggio's specialty: gaining entry to relationships, to houses, to locked rooms. And then disappearing. Without a trace. His skill became a habit.

During his time at the villa he became preoccupied with trying to gain entry into the English patient's mind. He, more than any other character, had the desire to read the other.

> Till this war he has been a better lover than husband. He has been a man who slips away, in the way lovers leave chaos, the way thieves leave reduced houses....But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense but to look for the truth in others.[21]

It was the ambiguity of not knowing that Caravaggio could not stand. The ambiguity of not knowing his position *in relation to others.* Rather than peer into himself, however, he peered into the others, which, disturbingly, only brought him closer to himself. In tracing he was traced.

Tracing, it seems, is also a part of reading.

As our reading group discussed our responses to this novel we came to understand how closely we had become implicated in the lives of the characters. Most interesting, however, was the way in which we were finally unable to separate our understandings of ourselves from our understandings of the characters. Throughout our discussions we remarked on the similarities between the way the characters in the book were "thrown" together at the villa and the way we had ended up together in the reading group. Ingrid was the first to notice:

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[19] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 39.

[20] Ibid., 222.

[21] Ibid., 117.

> It's quite remarkable how quickly, as a group of strangers, we have gotten to know each other by reading and talking about this book together. We seem so much closer than I would ever have imagined. Just like the characters in the novel. It's like we have opened our minds to each other.

But had we really? Was it our "minds" that were opened? Or, like Caravaggio, did we, in our relations with the novel and our relations with each other, experience "being traced" in our shared experience of "searching for the trace"?

"What's on your mind?" "I can't read minds, you know!" "You've been on my mind all day." It is clear that what we say about minds suggests a contradiction about what we believe about the mind and the body. On the one hand, there seems to be general agreement that the mind and the body are two separate things. This severing of mind and body emerged principally from the seventeenth century with the philosophy of René Descartes[22] whose famous maxim *cogito ergo sum* led to centuries of analytic philosophy which has generally underwritten the "modern" era. More commonly known as Cartesian Dualism, it has contributed to ongoing debates about the "problem of the mind." And it really is a problem. For if the mind and body are considered separate entities, one cannot validly infer, on the basis of knowledge about one, anything about the other.

On the other hand, "seeing is believing." Modern science has generally valued that which can be empirically perceived and measured. Hunches, intuitions, dreams and the imagination remain marginal to the empirical and rational because they often have little *verifiable* correspondence to the natural world they generally do not subscribe to some formal system of logic. Hence the fundamental contradiction: If we are to believe that minds and bodies are really separate, how are we to learn about other minds? Are our relations with others really only based on getting to know their bodies? Or does the body somehow give us access to the mind?

One way to resolve this dilemma is to assume that there *is* some correspondence between what is going on in the mind and what the body is "saying." Reading the body, then, would be the same as reading the mind. But of course, there is often little correspondence between mind and body. We sometimes look interested when we're not, innocent when we're guilty, calm when we're troubled. In fact, our relations with others would be continually tumultuous if our mind could be read through our body. How difficult life would be if our body betrayed every trace of our mind! Furthermore, it would eliminate the need to "search for the trace" since there would be no need to search. Everything on the *inside* would somehow be marked on the *outside*.

It is the inside/outside split which becomes most interesting, for it is generally assumed that the mind is in the brain, that it is *inside* — contained in a body which can be seen from the "outside." The problem of knowing the "other mind" of the "other person" is the problem of getting in. Getting into the other's mind in order to know the other. But is it really true that the mind is contained entirely in the brain? Is it true that the self is contained entirely in one's body? Or is it possible that the mind is not only distributed throughout the body, but also outside of the body? Is it possible that a mind can be shared by two or more persons? Can a collective mind and a collective self exist?[23]

In *The English Patient* four characters are thrown together into a bombed out villa in northern Italy at the end of the second World War. As the days and weeks slip by they gradually come to know one another. This is accomplished through conversation, shared responsibilities, what they say to each other about one another, and from what they *do not* say (for of course, silence is a form of communication). The English patient says little about himself or others and is not able to participate in the sharing of responsibilities. Hana comes to know him, in part, by reading parts of his "commonplace" book. In addition, she reads novels to him and, in the midst of those readings, talks about what has been read. And so, even though Hana cannot "read" the English patient's mind, nor does he tell her "what is on his mind," they come to know one another. She, by his commonplace book and by listening to responses he has to shared readings of other books; he, by noticing her habit of reading too quickly, the kinds of books she selects, the sound of her voice, her touch. But most of all each of them watches and is watched. They study each other. They try to read each other's faces, eyes, hands, bodies. They *search for the trace* that will permit them some understanding of the other. All this is accomplished in relation to the conditions of their throwness — the conditions of their being together in a place, at a particular time.

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[22] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1980).

[23] These are all exceedingly complicated questions which are dealt with, in greater detail in the next chapter where I present some of the literature on cognition and the mind.

There are consequences to not locating the trace, to not being able to locate oneself amid relations with others. It is the experience of being "othered," of being excluded, of being an outsider. Some of us are more used to, or more willing to live with these feelings of exclusion. In *The English Patient*, Kirphal Singh (Kip), the East Indian working in the British army as a bomb-disposal expert (a sapper), is accustomed to being an outsider. In fact, although he enters into relations with all of the other characters, he keeps his bed in a tent outside the villa, on the margins of the property. He retains a space around himself. Hana is attracted to this space and, although she and Kip become lovers, it is not the closeness but the space that attracts her:

> As they grow intimate the space between them during the day grows larger. She likes the distance he leaves her, the space he assumes is their right.[24]

For both Hana and Kip, it is *desire* that brings them together, and yet, at the same time, desire which keeps them apart. They each like this. It allows them room for their own sense of self. They have found the trace of the other, yet do not feel that they must appropriate it.

During a discussion of *The English Patient*, I confessed that unlike Kip and Hana, I disliked the feeling of being an "outsider" to the literary text and, as a consequence, always felt a great deal of anxiety during the initial stages of reading. I was afraid that I might never be able to "get in." Mena concurred, adding that when she had difficulty "getting in" she not only felt like a "stranger," but felt like an inadequate reader. She believed that the fault for not "getting in" must be related to some reading deficiency. Ruth's experience was very different. For her, "getting in" was part of the excitement, part of the sensual experience of reading:

> I loved the first chapters of this book, especially because it was not clear what was going on. It was a delicious mystery. Having to really listen to the text — to really have to *work* to get into it — was part of the wonderful experience of reading it.

What is the significance of remaining outside of relations with other people and outside relations with literary texts? Do these experiences intersect in any way? Are they related to our search for the trace?

The phenomenon of establishing relations with others is discussed by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*.[25] He suggests that often when in the presence of another person we experience ourselves as viewed from the perspective of the other. According to Sartre, this is the experience of being judged, of being endowed with a meaning which is not of our own making. We are no longer a being for ourselves but, instead, a being for the other. The other is finding meaning in us and interpreting it. Being watched, then, means being interpreted. At the same time, we can become the subject which interprets the other. We can also be the author of our own interpretations of ourselves. These readings, however, cannot be ranked, ordered, or separated. They occur within situations, and, as such, overlap and intertwine. Their beginnings, endings and intersections are invisible.

As we watch others operating in the world — in particular situations, events, and contexts — we do not merely learn about the other, but about the way the other perceives the world. We see through the other aspects of the world that we are unable to experience ourselves. What Sartre is suggesting is that the relation among subjects, the other, and the world in which they are held is one of *being* and not *knowing*. Sartre is seeking an ontological rather than epistemological basis for understanding. The way we *are* with each other is more fundamental than what we *know* about each other. At the same time, in order to *be* with one another, we need to *know* something about them. Knowing, however, can never precede being. It is an endless circle, but not necessarily a vicious one.

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[24] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 127.

[25] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956).

Entering into relations with others sometimes means that we must move more slowly than we are accustomed. The English patient knew that Hana was deeply troubled, yet he did not *know* the trouble. He also did not *ask* her about the trouble, just as she did not inquire into his. Instead, he taught her about reading:

> Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read Kipling slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses. He is a writer who used pen and ink. He looked up from the page a lot, I believe, stared through his window and listened to birds, as most writers who are alone do. Some do not know the names of birds, though he did. Your eye is too quick and North American. Think about the speed of his pen.[26]

Did he intend a double entendre? Did he wish her to know that it was also important in life to move slowly? Was it a lesson he had learned in his own relations with others? Here is Anna's interpretation:

> It really helped me when he gave us those "reading directions." I did slow down, and by slowing down I relaxed and began to see much more in the book. It's how I eventually really got into it. By slowing down enough to notice things that I had not noticed before. I think that maybe sometimes we move too quickly — not just as readers — but as persons. And when we move too quickly we don't really notice other people. We don't get to know who they really *are*.

Hana, the English patient, the others in the villa, Anna, the rest of the reading group, all became implicated in reading the other — other persons, other texts, other persons reading other texts. It was a complex web of relations, like all of our relations in life. As we were immersed in these emerging relations we were all trying to discern a *trace*, a *presence* of the other.

Sartre wants us to understand that in perceiving a *presence* of the other we are also simultaneously perceiving an *absence*. We perceive the other as *conscious*, but we do not experience their *consciousness*. At the same time, however, these absences refer to a presence — an experience one *could have* of the other's consciousness. This means, then, that the solution to the "other minds" problem involves finding some direct experience of the presence of another consciousness. Being watched by the other is such an instance. Sartre explains:

> If the other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which *sees* what I see, then my fundamental connection with the other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being seen by* the other.[27]

The experience of being watched gives us the experience of ourselves as object. We come to see ourselves as we are seen in the world by others. At the same time, we experience the other as a subject: the subject who perceives us as the object. Sartre goes on to suggest that our defense against being the object of the other-as-subject, is to engage in the same behaviour — to become a subject of the other-as-object. These are not relations based on what is *known*, but rather on relations of *being* with others that result in a sense of self as well as a sense-of-self-as-known-by-the-other. These are eventually fused into a unity of self that allows one to become functional in the world. It helps us to understand our position among other *seemingly* autonomous selves. This points to the importance of developing relations with others, since it is only through these relations that we are able to assess our location in the ecology of any situation. Sense of location is important to understanding our self, for we can only understand our self *in relation to* the other.

From these formulations it becomes evident that the self cannot be contained within the body or the mind, but emerges rather from our symbiotic relations with others.[28] In coming to know the other-as-object while, at the same time, being the object of the other-as-subject, we learn about ourselves and others. It is important to note, however, that it is not a static self or other that we come to know, for in the coming-to-know — in the understanding of the other's perception of the world — we are simultaneously changed. We evolve through our relations with the other. So, relations with others are essentially unstable in the sense that they are always fluctuating between our being-an-object to the other's subject and our being-a-subject to the other's object. Since it is the mind (brain) which is commonly believed to be the storage place for knowledge, it would follow that knowledge about the self must be somehow part of the mind. According to Sartre, however, the self (and by implication, the mind), does not really exist only in the body, for a sense of self emerges from our perceptions of, and relations with, others in the world. Just as these relations remain unfixed, so does our own sense of location amid the fabric of relations in which we are immersed. This is likely why our spatial and temporal *location* greatly influences our sense of self and our relations with others. It is impossible to maintain the *same* relation with the other when the context changes.[29]

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[26] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 94.

[27] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 344.

[28] These ideas have been summarized from my own reading of Chapters one and two of Part III of *Being and Nothingness*, with considerable interpretive assistance from the translator Hazel Barnes' introduction to the book, and Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat's book *Understanding Phenomenology*, in which the importance of the work of Sartre, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty to phenomenological inquiry is explained.

Herodotus understood this. He knew that the *truth* of history was not to be located in particular events, in particular perceptions, or even in particular interpretations of events by witnesses. Like a sense of self, the *trace* of history could only be located in the dynamic *among* persons, events and the *location* of these. And so, in order to convey an understanding of this, he needed to create a narrative that could somehow re-present, re-perform these human/world/event interactions. Michael Ondaatje also seems to understand this since *The English Patient* re-presents the same sort of interactions. It becomes clear that the relational dynamic between the four characters emerges from the continually evolving interaction of selves, events, memories of events, and texts, as contained within a particular *place*. All of these, as Gadamer suggests, exist at the end-point of an historically effected consciousness which as Sartre helps us to understand, is not really located *in each of us*, but exists *in the world.*[30] The consciousness that we have of ourselves, of each other, of our relations of each other, in no way *belongs* to us. It belongs to the situations that we share with others in the *places* that contain us. This is not only true in our real interactions with others in the world, it is true of our imaginative ones, such as those we have with literary texts. As readers, we become immersed in the throwness of the world-as-experienced by four characters over a particular temporal period, and, as we engage ourselves as both subject and object in that world, we come to simultaneously know about them and ourselves.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty[31] discusses the importance of the conditions which contain our developing relations with others. By reminding us that we are not placed in a *natural* world, but rather a world which has been shaped by preceding generations of human subjects, he points to the importance of the artifacts which condition our actions in the world. Human-made artifacts (such as tools, dwellings, texts) bear the imprint of human behaviour and, as a consequence, in their very *being-there* participate in the constitution of the self. He writes:

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[29] This is commonly referred to as "assuming another role" when in a different context. The problem with this "role switching" formulation is that it does not really account for the importance of the relation with "the Other" in these changed behaviors in concert with the change of "location." Changing location changes our relations with the Other, not just because there are differing "social" conditions, but also because there are "spatial" differences. This is why moving to a new city can put a strain on personal relations, particularly if the move is to a very different geographical and temporal location: changes in environment require changes in behavior, which necessarily require changes in the architecture of personal relationships. The way in which "place" becomes fused with "self" also helps us to understand why personal relations are difficult to maintain when partners live in different cities. There is a sense, over time, that there is a "movement away" from the other, which is often accounted for by pointing to "absence." Although absence from the Other is likely a factor in relational disintegration, it is also likely true that the two partners become distanced not by absence, but by the way in which the "place" the "location" of each Self has become woven in and through them.

[30] In her introduction to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, translator Hazel Barnes explains the important distinction Sartre makes between a "sense" of conscious Self as derived from the Ego and the situations which make this sense possible: "According to Sartre, the Ego is not *in* consciousness, which is utterly translucent, but in the world; and like the world it is the object of consciousness. This is not, of course, to say that the Ego is material but only that it is not a subject which in some sense manipulates or directs consciousness. Strictly speaking, we should never say 'my consciousness' but rather 'consciousness of me'" (p. xii). For Sartre, consciousness always overflows the "I" which tries to contain it, for consciousness is always related to other consciousness in the world, to which we cannot have direct access. Therefore, although we "experience" our own consciousness, we can never really own it.

[31] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

> Just as nature finds its way to the core of my personal life and becomes inextricably linked with it, so behavior patterns settle into that nature, being deposited in the form of a cultural world. Not only have I a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air and water, I have around me roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is moulded to the human action which it serves. ...In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. *Someone* uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified.[32]

The relations that we form with others are always mediated by the cultural artifacts which surround ourselves and others; cultural artifacts which carry a trace of human history and behaviour. Getting to know the other is not getting to know some autonomous entity, for it is impossible to make clear distinctions between a person and the things which surround them. Nor is it possible to understand "things" in the absence of knowledge about how they are used.

Our relationship with "things" became an important aspect of Heidegger's philosophy. For Heidegger, one could not know of "things" by merely looking at them; knowing meant having an understanding of how they were used an understanding, which could only occur in the relationship developed when subject and object became engaged in use:

> The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as tool.[33]

Knowing about "things" means knowing about how they are used, and, at the same time, being aware of their history of having been used by human subjects. It follows, then, that forming relations with others — getting to know them — always occurs in a cultural situation within which are placed artifacts which are not only immediately useful, but which carry the "trace" of their history, a trace of human behaviours which preceded a particular moment.

According to Merleau-Ponty, we do not first come to know ourselves and our situation *before* we come to know the other. We do not come to know others by watching them and making comparisons to ourselves. Rather, our sense of self co-emerges with our interactions with others and things within the experience of living with them. To illustrate this, he uses dialogue as an example:

> In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thoughts and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator.[34]

Only later, as one or the other speakers reflects on the conversation, does it appear as one's personal activity, and only then does it become part of a *personal* history. Only later, do these events come to be understood as comprising some aspect of the mind, some aspect of the sense of self. And it is this personalizing of our interactions and relations with others that forms the trace that marks the body.

As he reflected on his life — near the end of it — the English patient understood the importance of such relational marking:

> We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography — to be marked by nature, not just to

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[32] Ibid., 347-348.

[33] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

[34] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 354.

particular way, they require the reader to *imagine*, for it is only through the *imagining* that a deep relation with the literary text can be established. Summoning the imagination shifts the gaze from one of appropriation to one of relational participation. Unlike texts which wear their trace on the outside the trace of the literary text can only be found if the reader chooses to make a commitment to it, to enter into relations with it.

Looking for the Joke

> He picked up the fuze-pocket tube and peered down into it again. He saw nothing. He was about to lay it on the grass when he hesitated and brought it back up to the light. He wouldn't have noticed anything wrong except for the weight. And he would never have thought about the weight if he wasn't looking for the joke.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[37]

Kip did not know he would become a bomb-defusing expert. His potential was recognized by his commanding officer, Lord Suffolk, who understood that like many creative tasks bomb disposal required more than skill:

> [Y]ou can have a brilliant chess player at seventeen, even thirteen, who might beat a grand master. But you can never have a brilliant bridge player at that age. Bridge depends on character. Your character and the character of your opponents. You must consider the character of your enemy. This is true of bomb disposal.[38]

Lord Suffolk, like many of the sappers, is killed while defusing a bomb which has been re-configured — re-mapped — so that the detonation device is altered. The trick of staying alive was the ability to "read" each bomb, trying to think like the bomb's maker. Survival meant not merely *searching for the trace*, but *looking for the joke*. The joke in the bomb was the trick, the *game* being played between the bomb's author and its reader. Kip was a good reader, a good player. He always seemed to locate the joke. Not only did this help him stay alive, but each time he learned the punchline (found the trick) he was able to tell others. Similar to the experience of understanding jokes that are meant to be funny, learning the joke of the bomb ("getting it") depended on perceiving what was strange. Knowing what is strange, however, is only possible if one knows what is not strange. One of the reasons that Kip was successful was that, for him, the familiar was never transparent. It was his ability to see the familiar as strange that allowed him to see and understand the unusual — the trick. By being able to trace the way in which familiar and strange were configured (mapped) Kip was able to find the joke. Once he found the joke — the map of the trick — he had to care for it. "He had suddenly a map of responsibility."[39]

In *Le Plaisir du Texte,*[40] Roland Barthes uses the word *jouissance* to describe the pleasure one feels when engaged with a literary text. It is interesting that the Old English cognates for *jouissance* shared similar meanings to those from Old French. In both languages *jouissance* had explicit sexual connotations: pleasure, eroticism, orgasm. Interestingly, the English form eventually lost all of these meanings, while the French retained them. By describing the relation between reader and text as one of *jouissance*, Barthes pointed to the sensuality and sexuality of these reading relationships. Unfortunately, many of the erotic allusions were lost in the 1975 translation (entitled *The Pleasure of the Text)* where *jouissance* was translated as "pleasure, bliss." For Barthes, however, *jouissance* is simultaneously sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual.[41] *Jouissance* means more than *pleasure*, for *jouissance* implies not a state, but an action — a living through life, a playful eroticism.

There is an interesting connection between the words *joke* and *jouissance*. Joke originates

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[37] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 194.

[38] Ibid., 192.

[39] Ibid., 195.

[40] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

[41] The distinctions between the use of *jouissance* by Lacan and Kristeva is explained by Leon S. Roudiez, translator of Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), viii. In a forward to Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Faffar, Strauss, and Giroux), Richard Howard explicates the process of translation used by Richard Miller, making the same distinctions between English and French understandings of *jouissance* as made by Roudiez. Therefore, although there are important differences between all three writers (Barthes, Lacan, Kristeva) usage of *jouissance*, it seems appropriate to suggest that they all meant the term to include physical, emotional, sexual, and cognitive allusions.

> label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our experience.[35]

Intuitively, we know that we do not really have exclusive possession of our self. But then, neither do others have exclusive possession of it for us. In fact, in light of the formulations just presented, it seems that our sense of self becomes part of a world consciousness, part of the ecology of being-in-the-world. Although we may at times be unwilling, we are always and already participants. And just as we enter a world which is already marked with the historical trace of all those who have come before us, we leave having marked. A trace of us is left in the world.

But even while we still live, as the English patient reminds us, we feel the need to mark and be marked. Our bodies bear the mark of life. We have scars, stretch marks, wrinkles. An attempt to erase these markings (through cosmetic surgery, for example) seems a violation, a refusal to acknowledge the importance of having "been there" in the world, an attempt at anonymous interaction in the world. But of course we know that none of this anonymity is really possible, for no matter how hard we try we will always, in some way, wear our life on our sleeve. The trace is always there, although sometimes almost invisible. The trace represents our history of interactions in the world. It is the thread that runs through our bodies and connects us to an historical, contemporary, and future world and, at the same time, to *all of the relational ties* that *bind* us to these worlds. The trace is a *binding* and a *boundary*, and at the same time a *map*, for it is by *tracing* the sense of self in relation to others, to the artifacts that surround us, and the conditions of these relations, that we are able to reflect upon our own life in an interpretive way.

This helps us to understand why it was so important for each of the four characters in *The English Patient* to "sniff out" the trace of the others. By searching for the trace, they engaged in the kinds of interactions that led to established relations between them and, at the same time, forced them to inquire into themselves and their own situations. Even though, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us, we can never experience what the other experiences — we can only have our own experience — we can never really *own* that experience. It is always more than us:

> As soon as existence collects itself together and commits itself in some line of conduct, it falls beneath perception. Like every other perception, this one asserts more things than it grasps. ...[W]hen I say that I know and like someone, I aim, beyond his qualities, at an inexhaustible ground which may one day shatter the image that I have formed of him. This is the price for there being things and 'other people' for us, not as the result of some illusion, but as the result of a violent act which is perception itself.[36]

Relationality is always and forever based on acts of perception and interpretation. Once we locate the trace, we begin to try to *understand*. It is only through these intersubjective relations — the acts of reading the other and being read by the other — that we can have any individual experience of self. In order to experience the self, we need to experience some relation between self and other. This helps us to understand three things: First, the self can never be imprisoned in the body. It exists in the largely invisible relations between others, the culturally-made artifacts that emerge from the natural world, the conditions of our "throwness" in the world, and the historically effected conditions of all of these. Second, it helps to explain the phenomenon of intersubjective *desire*, for it is clear that without relations with others, we cannot really have a sense of self. The sense of self simply will not emerge on its own. It is not given; only the *potential* is given. Without relations with others we would never learn language; the world would have no meaning. As adults, we realize that the continual evolution of the self requires intersubjective relations which facilitate these ongoing re-readings and re-writings of the self. Finally, the importance of historical "collecting" places for the knowledge which has emerged from the interaction of selves can be more clearly understood. Things like *The Histories* do not merely chronicle human events, they chronicle human-world-human relations, and the *desire* which infuses these. Novels such as *The English Patient* are also collecting places for knowledge. Unlike non-literary texts, however, these require more than the participatory *gaze* of the reader. They require more than an objectified interest. Because of their structural features culturally announced as fictions that are to be read in a with the Latin *jocus* meaning jest, joke, game. A joke is a game of sorts; a game which we *play*. We both play and are played by the game that is the joke. The word *game* originates from the old Norse word *Gaman* meaning pleasure. *Play* has a variety of meanings, including to rejoice, to dance, to play for stakes, to make sport or jest of, to engage in amorous activities, or to be sexually indulgent. Although Barthes' contemporaries, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva have used the term differently, they have each acknowledged the implicit sensual and sexual aspects of any form of *jouissance* and the desire to which this word points. For Barthes, *jouissance* is playful pleasure; for Kristeva it most specifically means the joy or ecstasy when there is "meaning" in the relation between signifier and signified. For Lacan, *jouissance* points simultaneously to a phallocentric signifying system and sexual orgasm. All of these, to some degree, imply *pleasure, desire, the game, the joke.*

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[35] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 261.

[36] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 361.

"He's playing with her affections." "She's playing around on him." "Quit playing games with me!" What we say about our relationships with others — sexual or otherwise — demonstrates how we are mapped by desire. Like the word *jouissance* which simultaneously announces the sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual, the language we use announces our complicity in the joke (game). Poststructural theorists (particularly Derrida) have helped us to understand that words are not transparent. Their meanings are not self-evident, but rather, are always in a state of being fixed and unfixed in their *différance.*[42] Words simultaneously point to and defer meanings. We can only understand significations *in relation* to other ones. Black in relation to not-black, homosexual to heterosexual, female to male. Following Wittgenstein, Lyotard pointed to the consequences of these "language games,"[43] reminding us that, in the modern, Western world at least, we have become overly enamored with the "metanarrative," the "grand theory." Grand theories, although they are gamelike, are not necessarily playful.[44] It is the playfulness, the relational quality implied by this playfulness, that is pleasurable — *desirable.*

For Kip, locating the joke of the bomb — identifying the map — was *jouissance.* The experience of de-fusing the bomb was not unlike sexual exhibitionism; much of the pleasure is derived from the possibility of being caught. Jouissance is being in the midst of what Foucault would call a "limit-experience" where the juxtaposition of usually contrary experiences such as pain and pleasure announce a commonplace for new understanding.[45] This is the experience of being caught by the joke. "I just about died laughing." "I was so embarrassed I could have died." "I was frightened to death." Laughing, being embarrassed or frightened, dying — all bring us closer to some sense of being which is pre-linguistic. Like the orgasm. Something which can be planned, but when it arrives, is always surprising, always a form of boundary crossing. Such is the experience of *jouissance*. Like the joke, it defies theorizing.

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[42] As coined by Jacques Derrida, *différance* suggests an alternative to thinking in terms of simple presence. According to Derrida, différance is neither a word nor a concept, but points to a possibility of meaning. This complicated Derridean formulation is clearly explained in Brenda K. Marshall's *Teaching the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1992). She writes: "*Différance* is that which marks and makes possible the passage from one term of opposition to another, and which indicates that each term resides within the other" (p. 75), and goes on to quote Derrida: "One could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same (the intelligible as differing-deferring the sensible, as the sensible different and deferred;...culture as nature different and deferred, differing-deferring). Derrida, "Différance" *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27; cited in Marshall, 1992, p. 75.

[43] Ludwig Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: MacMillan,1953), uses the term *language games* to explain why various utterances may be explained/defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put. Three observations he makes about these games are: 1) their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit of not, between players; 2) if there are no rules there is no game; 3) every utterance should be thought of as a move in a game.

[44] Lyotard argues that the ordinary use of discourse in personal conversation and that which is validated in institutions are played according to radically different sets of rules. Within the former "the interlocutors use any available communication, changing games from one utterance to the next" while in the latter "supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible" are always required" [*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1984), 17]. It is the additional "game-rules" which delimit and constrain personal conversation and alternate "ways of knowing" which support the imperialism of the grand discourse of scientific rationalism, marginalizing the playful quality of conversational discourse.

[45] Foucault's theories about the "limit experience," and the way his views about this changed over his lifetime are discussed in James Miller's biography of Foucault, *The Passion of Michel Foucault.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

Reading bombs, reading novels, reading persons. Are all these mapped by desire, inscribed by the joke, the game, the *jouissance* of living *through* life? Does a novel have a joke? Do we? Does the success of our relationships with novels depend upon our ability to find the trace, to locate the joke?

> The rogue gaze could see the buried line under the surface, how a knot might weave when out of sight. He turned away from mystery books with irritation, able to pinpoint villains with too much ease.[46]

Readers, who like Kip, are quickly able to discern the map of the story — the story grammar — are thought to be "good" readers. In fact, in schools, the ability to "predict" what will happen next in a story is considered the mark of a proficient reader. Knowing what will happen next is thought to promote fluency, speed, and accurate comprehension. Similarly, persons who are able to quickly read — to predict — the character of the other are said to be *perceptive*, to be *good judges of character*. ("She read him like a book!") This is a quality which is admired and *desired*, for the ability to "read" the other means being able to adapt one's manner and approach to suit the other's character. Establishing quick relations with a book or another person, then, seems to be dependent on "reading the signs." But is this really a reading of what is *present* or is it a reading of what is *absent*, something only present in its possibility? Is it not the ability to notice the *presence of an absence* that we really value?

For Kip, finding the joke in the bomb meant looking for the absence. It meant looking for what lay between the configuration of wires and metal comprising the bomb. It meant reading the subtext. Locating the joke meant thinking about the "possible" history of the bomb's construction. This was not a question of *intention*, for the bomb maker's intention was clear. It went beyond intention to the realm of the *imaginative*. What did Kip *imagine* the bomb-maker was *thinking* when making the bomb? What did Kip know about bombs and their makers that would help him to "read" each of them, to de-code and interpret the complex grammar of the relation between bomb and bomb-maker in order to find the trick, to unweave the knot of the mystery? It might be said that Kip's success lay in his ability to "not see" a *predicted* grammar, but rather to see an *imagined, invented* grammar, for too-quickly predicting the *probable* grammar — the *probable* character of the bomb — would mean certain death. The joke was *never* to be found in the *familiar*, but always in some re-organization of the familiar. Therefore, it might be said, that Kip's talent lay in his ability to make predictions that emerged from his *imagination* rather than from empirical evidence, for it was by *imagining* the joke that he was able to locate it — to get it.

Gadamer makes it clear that our "pre-judgments" make possible new understandings. We need "old understandings" in order to generate new ones. Just as Kip's history of interactions with other bombs formed the foundation for his skill at finding the "joke" in new ones, so too does our history of interactions with other people help us to form new relations. We know, for example, that when we meet someone new who interests us, we *desire* information about them that goes beyond what can be retrieved by watching them. We need to allow them to tell us things about themselves. We ask them about their occupation, their interests, their "situation." We try to locate them within our map of understanding and, at the same time, begin the process of constructing a map of our understanding that includes them. As this is going on the other is doing the same. As the relationship develops, the simultaneous mapping continues, each becoming more elaborate as the history of their interactions with one another becomes more involved and complex.

Is there a *joke* to be located in the relationships between persons? It seems that it is not a requirement. However, it could be argued that the *joke* is the mystery, the absence. It is the game which must be played in the forming of the relationship. Often it is a sense of the "presence of an absence" that fuels emotional and physical desire in a relationship. The excitement of knowing *something* about the other, but not *everything*. If everything were known there would be no need to work to form a relationship; when the world is totally *given* it is no longer challenging. There is no game to be played, for the playing depends upon some resistance. It is the *resistance* that we often like. It is not surprising that lovers of many years sometimes find their relationships monotonous; the text of it is too familiar, too predictable. *Desire* has been squeezed out by *presence*. Too much has been revealed. The joke has been long told and is no longer surprising, funny, or exciting. *Jouissance* has evaporated.

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[46] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 111.

It was absence, not presence, to which both Hana and Kip were attracted in each other. Hana has a deep sense of all of this:

> He will sit up and flip his hair forward, and begin to rub the length of it with a towel. She imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man.[47]

As does Kip:

> When he looks at Hana he sees a fragment of her lean cheek in relation to the landscape behind it.[48]

Things not said, but known. The way in which the body is marked by the civilization that precedes it. Seeing a cheek *in relation to* the landscape behind it. Unlike in the bomb, the importance of the joke amid human relations is to know that it is there, but *not* to locate it. For once the joke is located it must be told; it must be given. Someone has to *get it*. Locating the joke of the bomb allows the bomb to be defused, to be killed. With bombs this is desirable. With relationships it is not. So, it seems, that perceiving the presence of the joke is important in relationships with others, but locating, telling, saying *once and for all* what the punch line, the bottom line, the *truth* might be is not so desirable. In order to maintain *jouissance* the play must continue. The game must not end.

And what of the reading relation with the literary text?

It is significant that when talking about our relations with a literary work of art (particularly a novel) we often speak of getting "lost" in it. There is a sense that it is only by becoming "lost" will we be "found." There is something hidden which is sought. *Hide and seek* seems to be a game which could be associated with forming relationships with the literary text. Playing *hide and seek* is a delicious combination of excitement, joy, nervousness. A *jouissance.* Hiding in the furthest corner of the closet, scarcely breathing, aware of the heartbeat, the breath, the rustle of clothing tucked into garment bags. You — the hidden one — awaits. Hoping to be found ... but not too quickly. The other senses you are near, hesitates in front of the closet door. You hear the other's breath. Then, a moment of silence; hesitation. The sudden rush of adrenaline when the closet door is whipped open! The other, not sure you are there, finding you, screams of capture, joy, delight. *Jouissance.* To be lost (hidden), sought, then found. One requires the others. There is no game without being lost, no game without being sought and found, no game without playing and being played by the game. It requires a "losing and finding" amid a dedicated playing. There is no joy, no game, when one partner does not "play" properly.

Hana and Kip sometimes play hide and seek. On one occasion, Caravaggio finds himself in the middle of their contest:

> She was lying on the sofa, had twisted the lamp inward so she could read, and had already fallen deep into the book. At some point later she looked up, listening, and quickly switched off the light. Was she conscious of him in the room? Caravaggio was aware of the noisiness of his breath and the difficulty he was having breathing in an ordered, demure way.
>
> Then everything in the room seemed to be in movement but Caravaggio. He could hear it all around him, surprised he wasn't touched. The boy was in the room. Caravaggio walked over to the sofa and placed his hand down towards Hana. She was not there. As he straightened up, an arm went around his neck and pulled him down backwards in a grip. A light glared harshly into his face, and there was a gasp from them both as they fell towards the floor. The arm with the light still holding him at the neck. Then a naked foot emerged into the light, moved past Caravaggio's face and stepped on the boy's neck beside him. Another light went on.
>
> "Got you. *Got you.*"[49]

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[47] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 217.

[48] Ibid., 218.

[49] Ibid., 223.

Hana wins this round of hide and seek by using Caravaggio as a distracter. Caravaggio becomes the dupe, the stand-in, the joke.

> She was singing it, *"I got you, I got you.* I used Caravaggio — who really does have a bad wheeze! I knew he would be here. He was the trick.[50]

Hide and seek, losing, finding, the joke, the trick, *got you.* It's all in the playing. The play; being played by the play.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gadamer equates the fusing of self and literary work of art to a game where the player simultaneously plays and is played by the game. Although constrained by the rules of the game, these rules do not determine the meaning of the game; only the playing can do that. Similarly, although the literary text is constrained by a set of linguistic conventions and stylistic structures as pre-given by the author, the meaning can only be realized in the evocation of the text by the reader. In a well-constructed and evocative literary text we find ourselves immersed in the midst of the performance that is the text (the play), and if we read well (play well), we find ourselves being immersed in (played by) the game that is formed between ourselves and the text. Gadamer tells us that:

> Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. Someone who doesn't take the game seriously is a spoilsport.[51]

He also suggests that:

> The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.[52]

Becoming lost (or hidden) in the literary text, then, is not a disorientation, a loss of direction, but rather a losing of the "given path" (the "real" world) in order that a "possible" path (a world that includes the reader's engagement with a literary text) may be found. Finding depends on something being hidden, sought, located. Hide and seek, lost and found is *jouissance.* And it is through this game, this *jouissance* of playing that one "finds oneself" within the relationship between the literary work of art. As Gadamer suggests, "In spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out."[53]

Playing oneself out in the relation between self and literary text, however, means living in between submission to and dominance over the text. The game is not well played if one is overly domineering or overly submissive. As Ingrid read *The English Patient* she was determined to "control" the text, until she found that this made "playing the game" impossible:

> I can remember fighting and fighting. Fighting for control. Fighting so that I could control the book. Because that's what I normally do when I'm reading a book. I feel like I've got to have control over where I'm going with this thing. But with this book I didn't feel like I had any control and I really found that frustrating. But the minute I surrendered to the book and said "Okay, I'm going to stop fighting. I'm just going to read!" was when it started to have some meaning for me.

In order for Ingrid to "play well" she needed to try not to "fight" the text, for fighting is not playing. Playing involves a "to and fro" movement; a play of movement rather than a coercion. Mena, on the other hand, found that submission to the text excluded her from the game:

> The characters all seem so detached for me. I don't see the connections. I keep waiting for the author to put it together for me, and he's not. So I'm stuck. Stuck waiting for some connections to be made. I can't seem to finish this book.

Being stuck stops the play. In discussions of our involvement with *The English Patient* we all agreed that the development of a relationship between the reader and this text depended upon a playing which demanded an equal commitment from both reader and author/text. Each needed to "play well" in order for a meaningful relation to be established. This meant that the reader could neither dominate the text, nor be dominated by it. The forming of the relationship which would lead to the evocation of meaning between reader and text depended instead on an attentive and committed "game-playing" between reader and text.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 102.

[52] Ibid., 103.

[53] Ibid., 108.

Playing as a metaphor for reading the literary text becomes an important way to help us to understand the importance of "the joke" in the relationship between reader and text. The "joke" is not to be found in the author, the text or the reader. Unlike in the bomb, the joke is not meant to be "found" to be "defused" (decoded) in order for the "trick" to be neutralized. The joke in the relationship between the reader and the literary text is the vanishing horizon; although it exists, it can never be reached; it can never be grasped. For the joke is that ever-evolving relation that exists between "hide and seek" — the excitement of the playing of the game. No matter how often we engage in the game of hide and seek — even if we hide in the same closet each time — there is the excitement of what the "finding" will bring: an eruption of excitement, pleasure, *jouissance*.

The joke, as it exists in the relation between reader and literary text, is that aspect of the relation which is "hidden," that which is not given. As Iser has helped us to understand in the last chapter, the relation between reader and literary text depends upon a conditioned imagination, the reader's ability to imagine a "possible" world in his or her engagement with the literary text. That which is signified by a word, an image in the "real" world, may become ambiguous in the literary text. The signifier becomes split. Words become symbols for things other than what they represent in the "real world." It is important for the reader to know that they are to see and understand all words, images, characters, situations in the literary text *as if* they were real. It is the *as if* relationship which contains the joke, for it is within the space of this relationship that the reader's own world as well as his or her own self, must also become re-configured.

In order to "get into the text," to become "hidden" (lost) within the formulations presented by the author, the reader must become committed to the playing of the game. The reader must assume that there is a *difference* between this text and others (non literary texts, that is). It is in assuming the difference, and becoming committed to playing the play that is the joke of the text that the reader will become played. Being *lost* in the text, then, is *finding* oneself hidden in the play of the text. Paradoxically, it is the playing, the hiding, the losing that allows one to be sought and eventually found. If the reader is never "found" the relation between the text and the reader has not been meaningful, for it is only in the evocation of meaning between reader and text does the reader learn something about herself that was not known before the reading. Locating the *joke* in the relation between reader and text, then, means arriving at something *meaningful*.

Unlike relations with other texts, however, this "meaning" is not pre-determined. It is not the thesis of an essay or the answer to a mathematics problem. It is what has been learned through the playing of "hide and seek" in the relational space between reader and text. *Locating the joke*, then, is the *playing of the game*. Again, Iser helps us to understand that the game of the text is made possible by the "gaps" — the spaces deliberately left by author between that which is given and that which must be formulated by the reader:

> Communication in literature ... is a process set in motion and regulated not by a given code but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed: the explicit in turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves.[54]

If the reader is not able (or not willing) to engage in the construction of "gap filling" formulations, there will be no relation formed between reader and text. It is within these "working relations" which, paradoxically must occur in the to and fro motion of the "play" between author, text and reader, that the "joke" may be located. But, as the post-structural theorists have convincingly shown us, the "joke" can never be told, for unlike the joke that is meant to be funny, or the joke in the bomb, the *getting it* does not depend on some pre-determined intention. *Getting it* is to be located in the meaning which co-emerges with our simultaneous living in the world and living in the world created through our playing in and with the literary text. The joke in the literary text however, like the relations we have with other persons, is never found "once and for all," for like our relations with others, we do not want our relations with the literary text to be defused, neutralized, killed. The game — the evocation of meaning — does not end when the last page has been read. For like all relational experiences, those between reader and literary text becomes part of the fabric of the reader's world. It becomes a referential memory.

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[54] Iser, *Prospecting*, 34.

Looking for the joke can be understood, then, as a metaphor for the constant search for meaning in our relationships with others and with literary texts. It is a game of hide and seek that we are always and forever in the process of playing. We sometimes "hide" in the other in order to be "found"; the other hides in us in order to "find" her/himself. We can only know our selves in relation to the other. Just as our sense of self, of mind, or of consciousness is not to be found inside of our bodies, but rather in the ecology of our intertextual relations in the world, neither can the meaning of the literary text and reader be considered in isolation. Like *The Histories*, the meaning between reader and literary text is located in that which is evoked in the historically effected interactions which locate us in a present moment. Just as the *meaning* of history is not to be located in particular *events*, but rather in the *relationships* which circumscribe those events, the meanings which we evoke in our relations with literary texts are *always* evoked within a complex fabric of other historically effected relationships.

Jouissance, in our relationships with others, is simultaneously sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual. This is true of our relationships with literary texts. Playing a game well is always an interesting set of paradoxes: submitting and dominating, predicting and reflecting, playing and being played. Playing well means knowing more than the "rules of the game"; playing well depends upon a commitment to the game and to a *desire* to give oneself up to the game. It requires, in some sense, learning to be uncomfortable; learning to live with ambiguity; learning to tolerate the resistance of the literary text itself. Ambiguity precedes the relation with the literary text. Like any relationship, the one between reader and text demands a tolerance for not knowing. This is because any relationship (human or otherwise) is primarily ontological, not epistemological. The relationship between Kip and Hana was not based upon what they *knew* about one another but on who they *were* to one another. The relationship between the English patient and his copy of *The Histories* was not contained in *what was written* but rather in the relationship of the writer(s) (both he and Herodotus) and the written. The relationship between Ingrid and *The English Patient* and the failed relationship between Mena and the same book can only be discussed in the way they *were* with the book, not what they *knew* about the book.

All of these relationships, between self and other, self and literary text, selves meditated by relations with literary texts, exist in an ecology of lived experience. Just as we are really unable to separate our sense of self from our body, our sense of self from our relations with others, we are unable to extricate ourselves from the relation which we form with the literary text. Nor can the literary text extricate itself from us. Just as we are altered for having read, the text is altered for having been read. Although it may be argued that the marks on the page remain the same, the *significance* of the marks are always unstable. Because significance must exist within ever-evolving *meanings* as constituted *relationally* it is clear that *The English Patient* is altered for having been read. The question again becomes one of location. Are our human-text-literary relationships always and forever formed in the realm of the *symbolic?* Or is it possible that there are some relationships, or some significations, which move us into another realm? Is it this *other* place which marks the particular relation between reader and literary text?

Transgressing the Symbolic

> Hours later we were in the sandstorm that hit us out of clear morning, coming from nowhere. The breeze that had been refreshing had gradually strengthened. Eventually we looked down, and the surface of the desert was changed....We had to keep moving. If you pause sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in. You are lost forever.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[55]

For the English patient, the desert had been a place to play hide and seek, for with its ever-shifting sands, history was quickly covered. Or re-covered. Too much covering, however, such as would occur if one remained stationary during a sandstorm, meant suffocation. The desert was both liberating and restricting; one could feel confined and exposed at the same time.

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[55] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 136-137.

Unlike the European cities he had known, the desert, for the English patient, had an elusive history. Like many other explorers who roamed the deserts of Northern Africa during the two decades prior to the second world war, for him the desert became a place of enticement, of mystery.

> Where was the Oasis of Zezura?
>
> [I]n the emptiness of deserts you are always surrounded by lost history.[56]

But the ever-shifting sands — the covering, re-covering, uncovering — permitted no mapping of the desert. There were few landmarks, few points of reference. The desert resisted containment by a map, by a map-maker. It resisted the language of maps, the choreography of place. The desert, and the historical secrets/places/events which it held, would not be pinned down to particular places on a map. For the English patient it became a constant reminder of the excess of life, the excess of meaning, the refusal for *everything* to be contained within imposed categories. The desert defied categories. The English patient eventually discovered what centuries of nomadic desert people had always known: There *is* a truth in the desert, but it is never fixed. Like sand it shifts suddenly — circling, rising, settling in re-configured patterns, which although familiar, are always original.

Living within an ever-shifting landscape has its consequences. If a sense of self is known in relation to others and to a sense of place, existing in a place that is always on the move, and where all inhabitants move, means that the sense of self feels less fixed. The self, like the dwellers of the desert, becomes nomadic. It defies boundaries, categories, names:

> [A]fter ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation.[57]

In order for the self to function, however, it must have a sense of stability, of being "centered". Being "de-centered" means madness, psychosis, what psychotherapists call "borderline syndrome." Jane Flax explains that borderline syndrome occurs when the subject lacks a coherent, unified core-self.[58] The lack of a core-self leads to a psychosis emerging from the lack of a self-referent through which the subject is able to enter into and negotiate the transitional spaces between self and other, inner and outer, reality and illusion. Most of us have learned strategies for escaping this condition. We find "collecting" places for our sense of self. For many of us, these are located in things around us: our possessions, homes, stories and rituals. Our self is mapped, so to speak, in the historical, cultural, and personal conditions of our living through life. These become boundaries, markers, signifying systems which help us to locate our self.[59]

What happens when one is placed in the desert, away from one's own historical, cultural, and familial borders, markers and signifying systems? What become the "collecting places" that facilitate the continued revitalization of the self? For the English patient, his commonplace book — his annotated copy of *The Histories* — becomes an important collecting place for the self. And it was Katharine Clifton's desire to know the other — to appropriate the other — that provoked her to ask him for it:

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[56] Ibid., 135.

[57] Ibid., 139.

[58] In her book *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Jane Flax discusses her psychotherapeutic work with patients suffering from "borderline syndrome." "Borderline patients," she suggests, "lack a core self without which the registering of and pleasure in a variety of experiencing of ourselves, others, and the outer world are simply not possible." She criticizes postmodern theorists call for a "decentered self" as "self deceptively naive and unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis....Borderline patients' experiences vividly demonstrate the need for a core self and the damage done by its absence. Only when a core self begins to cohere can one enter into or use the transitional space in which the differences and boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, reality and illusion are bracketed or elided" (pp. 218-219).

[59] Post-structuralist theorists (particularly Derrida) would reject this formulation, insisting that there are not borders in language, and therefore any borders in lived experience are illusory. The "desert" metaphor, as it is played out in the balance of this chapter, however, demonstrates more clearly my position between structuralism and post-structuralism.

> 'That book you look at in the evenings?' 'Herodotus. Ahh. You want that?' 'I don't presume. If it is private.' 'I have my notes within it. And cuttings. I need it with me.' 'It was forward of me, excuse me.' 'When I return I shall show it to you. It is unusual for me to travel without it.'[60]

And for a short period of time before the war, during their explorations of the Northern African desert, the English patient and Katharine become lovers. The relationship, Katharine knew, depended on a transgression of boundaries — not just boundaries of friendship and marriage (for her husband was the English patient's friend and colleague), but a transgression of the self. Asking for the English patient's commonplace book meant asking for the self of an other. Offering to show it meant an offering of the self.

Even in the desert where boundaries shift, where things cannot be contained, the nomads who live there must maintain a sense of self. But the desert teaches the nomads that the truth of the self is no more fixed than the truth of the desert. Surviving in the desert means knowing that yesterday's truth about the location of the oasis is not today's, for the oasis is contingent upon ever-shifting conditions.

> When no rain fell the acacias withered, the wadis dried out ... until water suddenly reappeared fifty or a hundred years later. Sporadic appearances and disappearances, like legends and rumours through history.[61]

Insisting that water might be found where it had been located by previous explorers usually meant death. The truth of the desert is a contingent truth. Truth telling is important, but the telling of truth does not mean the fixing of it.

When truth is fixed it becomes dogma, dictatorship, domination.

To know you is to love you.

In coming to know the other, we often become simultaneously consumed with wanting to envelop the other, and to be enveloped. There is a sense that in order for the relationship to work, there needs to be some reconstruction of the self, and so, to enable that reconstruction, the infrastructure of the self (its history, its character) must be excavated. Katharine and the English patient have a stormy relationship, for although they share passion, love, desire, they do not share selves. They do not cross the border to the other which would allow each self to co-emerge from their history of interactions with one another. Although they were consumed with "knowing" the other, they could not re-write the "truth" of their selves as it existed in their relation with each other, and as such, like many involved in a secret relationship, they became victims of their own fixed truth.

Katharine asks: "If I gave you my life, you would drop it. Wouldn't you?"[62]

Keeping their affair secret meant standing still; allowing the sands to gather over them, smothering life. They could not be true to themselves, true to each other, or true to their relationship.

A number of the post-structural theorists have rejected the possibility of such "truth-telling" insisting that truth, as something stable and fixed, does not really exist.[63] Derrida suggests that "There is no such thing as truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it. Even if it should be for me, about me, truth is plural."[64] As a product of hierarchically organized relations of power, normalized discursive practices, and inevitable processes of marginalization and silencing, the relationship between the signified and the signifier (concept and word) is always and already problematic. There is no *universal* truth, no *fixed* meaning, no *bottom* line, no *last* word. Like the truth of the desert, all truth is conditional, contingent, shifting, and elusive. This understanding means, of course, that there is no single author of truth, no single reader, no single interpreter. Truth always, already, forever, depends upon everything.

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[60] Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 231.

[61] Ibid., 141.

[62] Ibid., 145.

[63] Such as the work of Jacques Derrida, particularly *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), and *Writing and Différance*, trans. A. Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyper Reality*, trans. William Weaver, (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1983); and Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*..

[64] As cited by Pauline Rosenau in *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 97.

Does this theory of language, of signification, of truth, allow life to go on? To exist? Does this existence in an endless chain/play of signifiers — an unfixable truth — allow us to maintain a sense of identity and an ability to engage in relationships with others? Do we not need *some* sense of borderline, of boundary, of category, of "map" in order to function? To have a *meaningful* existence? Does not *meaning* require a site of collection and intersection which is in some way *contained?*

Even in the desert there are meeting places. Places to find food and water, shelter and companionship. Collecting places. Places that have a name, a purpose, a function, a history, and a meaning. We have names for these places: *routines, rituals, artifacts.* There are mealtimes, Saturday evenings out, photograph albums, favourite meals, movies and songs. Like *The Histories* these become collecting places for "truths" — the truth of having marked and having been marked; the truth of having lived; the truth of having moved through the world. All of these exist within the realm of the symbolic; all of them present and re-present signifying systems. Without these traces and maps to keep track of the choreography of our selves and our relations with others, we feel alienated from our own lives.[65] For although we have a sense that the "truth" of our situation may be constantly changing, just as the truth of the world around us is changing, we have the urge — the *desire* — to keep track of it.

Julia Kristeva has helped us to understand that even though our signifying practices are always in a state of flux, this flux must always occur in a rhythm of the fixing and unfixing of meaning, of truth.[66] As a psychoanalyst who is ethically bound to "cure" her patients, Kristeva believes that insisting that there is no truth is irresponsible. In psychoanalytic practice there are actions which are more effective than others; some actions and interventions will lead to a "cure" while others won't. *The cure is the truth.* It is not a generalizable truth, but a particular truth. A truth for this person, in this situation, in this place. But a truth nonetheless. It is a relational truth. Toril Moi explains:

> The modern, unstable and empty subject, [Kristeva] argues, ought not to be fixed and stabilized, but to be turned into a *work in progress.* This means that psychoanalytic patients must be left, at the end of analysis, in a position which enables them to express themselves.[67]

But this expression, of course, requires a sense of self — a subjectivity — governed by the immersion of the speaking subject in discursive practices. This is problematic, since it is precisely these discursive sites which the borderline patient is trying to escape. Kristeva argues that the kind of speaking or writing most appropriate for such patients is *imaginative,* for it is only in the realm of the imaginative that the subject is able to grasp a sense of self or identity, but *not be required to fix it into a rigid self.* Kristeva writes:

> I think that in the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantees identity. ...The imaginary of the work of art, that is really the most extraordinary and the most unsettling imitation of the mother-child dependence. [It is] its substitution and its displacement towards a limit which is fascinating because inhuman. The work of art is independence conquered through inhumanity.[68]

It is within the realm of the imaginary that the "borderline" patient and the analyst are most purely able to engage in the discourse of transference. For Kristeva transference becomes a psychoanalytic situation in which love (transference love) is allowed to establish itself, allowing the subject to find a location for her/himself within the symbolic order, to move from chaos to a subject-position which permits speaking — truth telling. This is not a universal truth, an absolute truth or a generalizable truth, but a truth which emerges from a *relation* between two speaking subjects held within a particular situation.

For Kristeva the move to the imaginary and the symbolic are dialectically involved in the speaking subject's production of language. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* [69] she theorizes that all signifying processes are dependent upon *symbolic* and *semiotic* processes. The semiotic process is related to the *chora* — a word she has borrowed from Plato and redefined as:

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[65] This is likely one of the reasons why persons who lose their personal belongings through fire, earthquake, tornado, divorce, feel separated from themselves. It can also account for our desire to carry with us "artifacts" such as photographs, books (I find it impossible to part with books that I have read and loved), for there is a sense the book, the photograph, the Christmas ornament from our youth, contains part of the Self. We remember and know ourselves in and through these artifacts.

[66] See *The Kristeva Reader,* ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[67] Ibid., 14.

[68] Ibid.

> an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and ephemeral stases....The *chora*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality. Our discourse — all discourse — moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that is simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. Although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitely posited: as a result, one can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form.[70]

The semiotic as "discrete quantities of energy [that] move throughout the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such"[71] eventually becomes arranged according to the conditions of the speaking subject's historical throwness, genetic configuration, bio-chemical state, family and social structures, cultural conditions, and so on. The ecology of the body-mind-world system, then, contributes to the semiotic system — the chora — from which the various symbolic systems at once depend upon and refuse (for much of the chora *must* be refused in order for a core-self to become developed). The process of signification then (which for Kristeva is the *jouissance* experienced when there is meaning between signifier and signified) is an articulation of two processes — the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*.

Although any symbolic system is dependent upon the semiotic system, it is not true that the semiotic *precedes* the symbolic. Rather, the two co-emerge from their interactions with one another. Although the *chora* is an ever-evolving continuum, in order for signification to occur, it must be split. It is the splitting of the chora that allows the subject to speak, for the subject to arrive at meaning. The chora may be thought of as the "excess" of language; the drives, pulsions, the infinite heterogeneous *possibility* of language, while the symbolic is that from the chora which has been claimed, mapped — *choreographed* — by the symbolic system(s). This is an important point, for if the chora is understood as that which is simultaneously needed and refused by the symbolic system, then acts of signification both depend upon and repress the semiotic chora. For Kristeva, conceptualizing of the two systems meant a reconceptualizing of the importance of the imaginary as invoked by poetic language, for it is in the literary text that the subject (reader) is able to transgress the symbolic to the semiotic. In Kristeva's words:

> [I]t is a transgression of the thetic when truth is no longer a reference to an object that is identifiable outside language; it refers instead to an object that can be constructed through the semiotic network but is nevertheless posited in the symbolic and is, from then on, always verisimilar.[72]

Because it has the capacity to transgress the symbolic, the realm of the imaginative is able to rupture the symbolic, altering it forever. In its capacity to invoke the imaginative, the literary text facilitates transgressions of the symbolic into the semiotic chora, thus changing the processes of signification.

At this point it is important to recall, from chapter one, Iser's formulation of the reader-literary text relation through which he suggests that the *difference* between these and relations with non-literary texts is the ability for the literary text to invoke and condition the imagination. Although Iser is not a semiotician or a psychotherapist, it would seem that his formulation of the importance of the imaginative agrees with Kristeva's for both seem to have described the imaginative as a place of transgression, a place where the reader is able to engage in an *as if* world, a place where the symbolic is ruptured by the semiotic.

For the English patient, the desert was, metaphorically speaking, the semiotic chora — a largely unformulated, motile, ever-shifting space which resisted mapping. The few reference places — the villages, towns, oases — were part of the symbolic system (the signifying system) of place. Like any symbolic system, these points of reference at the same time depended upon and refused the desert (the chora). They lived with and against one another. The English patient, like the other desert nomads, lived within the symbolic, with and against the semiotic chora of the desert. Because the symbolic system of place within the desert was vague, ambiguous, and difficult to map, it was like an open text; it ruptured the symbolic more than other places. The symbolic system of place in the desert demanded more of its inhabitants. It demanded a greater tolerance for resistance, for difficulty and for the ambiguity of "not knowing" whether or not there would indeed be an oases or a town the next day. Or would the oasis be dry? Would the direction to the town be lost in a sandstorm? One did not stand still in the desert. To survive one had to keep moving.

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[69] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[70] Cited in Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, 93-94.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 110. For Kristeva the "thetic" refers to the primordial moment of language when the signified and the signifier collect into some form which has meaning. The uttering of a word or a sentence is a thetic moment.

It was this perpetual motion with/in/against the symbolic and the semiotic of their own sense of selves that the English patient and Katharine located their relationship, but because there was no fixing of *truth* of their *relation,* no *fixing in the symbolic order* (it remained secret) there could be no rupture by the semiotic. For something new to be formed there must be a simultaneous fusing and rupture of something old. This is a lesson of hermeneutics. By trying to "keep intact" a pre-formulated sense of self, neither the English patient, nor Katharine were able to engage the semiotic in order to transform the symbolic (their own selves) into a relation between the two. Because the borders of the relationship needed to remain fixed (closed), the relationship (the symbolic) could not make access to the semiotic. Closed systems eventually stagnate; they become suffocated with their own debris.

> We had to keep moving. If you pause sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in. You are lost forever.[73]

The truth of the interaction of symbolic systems, whether in the desert, or in the relations between self and other, depends upon perpetual motion. Not frantic motion, but motion which co-emerges from the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic orders. It is within this co-emergent fabric of relations that the reading of the literary text can be located.

Reading requires moving, locating, and re-locating one's self in relation to a co-emergent world. It is a continual bridging of newly opened spaces — gaps — which make themselves present in the ever-emerging intertextual fabric of lived experience. In her essay,"Bodyreading," Madeleine Grumet suggests that the act of reading is a bridging of the gap between public and private worlds. This move from the private to the public is often difficult, for in the journey we are confronted with the ambiguity of the traveling. She writes:

> If reading is a passage between the public and the private world, the journey is fraught with danger. To give oneself up to the text is to relinquish the world in order to have the world; it is a birth and a death. And so it should not surprise us to find a child wary of reading, reluctant to follow that line across the page without knowing where it leads.[74]

In order for meaning to be evoked, however, the passage *must* be made. This passage (reading) like all signifying practices, becomes what Kristeva calls *transposition*: "the ability to pass from one sign-system to another, to exchange and permutate them."[75] It is the intertextuality of sign systems — the transposition — which allows reading to occur, for it is through the process of transposition that a new signifying practice (i.e., deriving meaning from reading) is able to occur. Without transposition reading is meaningless. Formulating a relationship with a literary text, in addition to invoking a series of intertextual transpositions within the realm of the symbolic order, also means transgressing the symbolic — rupturing these orderly transpositions — in order to permit the imaginative. And as we have learned from Iser and from Kristeva, it is precisely the imaginative on which the boundary-crossing possibility of the literary is hinged, and why, as Grumet suggests, the child (or any reader for that matter) should be wary of following the line which is likely to lead to transpositions that dip into the imaginative realm of the semiotic chora. For that line leads to the unknown, the unexpected. Following the line means playing the game, it means *searching for the trace, looking for the joke, transgressing the symbolic order* and anticipating the *jouissance* which can only be discovered when the relation between reader and literary text becomes established.

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[73] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 136.

[74] Madeleine Grumet, "Bodyreading," in *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 136.

[75] Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader,* 112.

Locating Transformative Spaces

> The multiplicity of consciousness appears to us as a *synthesis* and not as a *collection*, but it is a synthesis where totality is inconceivable.
>
> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*[76]

As our group continued to read and discuss *The English Patient*, we became more and more woven into the book. And it became woven into us. Individually. Collectively. Each of us, the characters in the book, the author, Herodotus's *The Histories*, the English patient's relationship with his commonplace book, Hana's relationship with Kip, Kip's with Hana's, Ingrid's frustration with the book, Mena's inability to finish it, my concern that she would/could not, the excursions into the realm of the imaginative as conditioned by *The English Patient* for us and by Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* for Hana and the English patient — all of these became fused, transposed one into the other, into a complex fabric of relations that in no way could ever be unraveled, shattered, discerned one from the other.

And now, with this text, I have attempted to bring together, into a symbolic system, a sense of the complexity of this web of transposition, the web of intertextual desire. Although all of our lived experience occurs within a web — a tightly woven fabric of experience — it seems that the inclusion of the relation with literary text (whether it becomes publicly shared or not) significantly alters the texture and the weave of that experiential fabric. The experience of reading is not something which is merely added to a "collection" of experiences; it, as Sartre suggests, becomes "synthesized" into our consciousness of our lived experience. I have tried to show, however, that our sense of consciousness of our selves is not something contained within us, but rather is something which is located in the collecting places of particular relations which we establish with others and with the world that contains us. The relation that we establish with the literary text is one of these collecting places for the self and, as such, becomes one of the places that mediates our relations with others and with the world.

However, the relationship between the reader and the literary text often becomes more generative, more transformative than our relations with other texts and even with other persons. Because the evocation of meaning with the literary text depends upon an imaginative engagement by the reader, the developed relationship sometimes requires that the reader transgress the boundaries of the symbolic system(s) into the semiotic chora. This is the place of *jouissance* — the transformational space opened up through the relation between reader and literary text. It is within this relational space that the reader's world becomes re-woven, and it is this re-weaving of the reader's self that alters the reader's interactions with the world. It is an infinite chain of significance. The relationship with a literary text, then, is not merely an *escape* from the reader's lived world; it is a relationship, which, through the space opened up by the conditioned imagination of the reader, becomes a *transformative* space.

This is not an exclusive formulation. Of course these transformational spaces — these transgressions of the symbolic order — do not necessarily *depend* upon the literary text. They can occur anytime images or emotions are aroused which escape any language at hand. A visual work of art, a musical composition, feelings of love, sexual desire, can all become experiences which make us more aware of the semiotic chora and which can create transformational spaces that alter, more profoundly than other experiences, the conscious fabric of our lived experience.

The significance of the literary text, however, as Iser has convincingly demonstrated, lies in its power to simultaneously *use language* in order to *transgress language*. The well-constructed literary text asks that the reader become more nomadic than usual, searching for the trace of meaning by moving through the often ambiguous landscape of the text. It is this movement, through an uncharted landscape, that becomes the choreography of reading leading ultimately to the evocation of the artwork: the relation between reader and text. Because the literary text does not demand a fixed truth, the reader can continue to be nomadic. Because the "truth" of the text depends as much on the reader as the text, each reading (even repeated readings) brings the reader to a newly formulated truth and, in turn, to a newly woven fabric of relations and experiences.

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[76] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 400.

It is important to remember, however, that these relations between individual readers and texts, although generally developed amid *private* relations between one reader and one text, are never really private, since the *significance* of the reading *depends upon* the public context of reading while it, at the same time, *alters* the very context in which it is situated. Therefore, the *significance* of the reading relationship is a *co-emerging* significance; it can never be located amid fixed systems, but rather emerges from the interaction of systems which are always in a state of interdependent flux. Any intervention into the reading process, then, must be considered within an explication of the significance of the relation between reader and literary text. The English patient's reading directions to Hana — which, in turn, became reading directions for us — is an example of the way in which meaning *co-emerges* from moment of intertextual transposition.

As English teachers reading and discussing this book, we became increasingly aware of the inter-relational dynamic which occurred within the context of our reading group, and more particularly how this dynamic, as it was evoked by our individual readings of *The English Patient* helped us to more clearly understand that reading, teaching and curriculum were inextricably woven together. It seemed so complex, in fact, that several group members felt overwhelmed. How could we wrap our minds (and in turn our teaching practice) around the complexity of this fabric of intertextual relations? What was the relationship between what we had learned about reading and our role as teachers who used literary texts in our classrooms? What does it mean to use the literary text as a classroom text? Is it possible for the transformative potential of the relationship with the literary text to also serve as a space for development of the English curriculum, or does the latter somehow foreclose on the former? How can *significance* of one relationship (reader-text) understood within the complex fabric of interpersonal relations in the classroom?

The next chapter will begin the process of excavating these questions by providing a discussion of reading as embodied action.

Chapter Four

READING AS EMBODIED ACTION

I am a person who if left alone in someone's home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us.

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[1]

[T]he body must be seen as the enduring locus to which a life history accrues, and hence to which the character of that history is indissolubly associated.

Anthony Kerby, *Narrative and the Self*[2]

Revolutionary achievements in the arts, in the sciences, and in moral and political thought typically occur when somebody realizes that two or more of our vocabularies are interfering with each other, and proceeds to invent a new vocabulary to replace both.

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*[3]

This is a story of how I fell in love with a woman, who read me a specific story from Herodotus. I heard the words she spoke across the fire, never looking up, even when she teased her husband. Perhaps she was just reading it to him. Perhaps there was no ulterior motive in the selection except for themselves. It was simply a story that had jarred her in its familiarity of situation. But a path suddenly revealed itself in real life.

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

Three Stories of Reading

One: The chapter from which the preceding passage was taken is written from the point of view of the English patient, and begins with the line "I promised to tell you how one falls in love."[5] With this line we, the readers of the novel, become part of the collective at the villa; we listen with Caravaggio, Hana, and Kip as the English patient tells his story. And, as usual, this story of the English patient's past life is bound up in layers of stories. This one begins with Katharine, who, within the context of a celebration marking their return from a week-long expedition in the desert, recites a story from the English patient's copy of *The Histories*. The story is about the barbarian king Candaules who was so obsessed with his wife that he continually described her remarkable beauty to his friends. Concerned that he was not believed, Candaules urges one of his favoured spearmen Gyges, to hide in his bedroom in a place where Gyges would be able to observe the Queen undressing. Gyges does so, but is seen by her. Because she immediately suspects that this has been arranged by her husband, she remains silent. The next day she calls Gyges before her and insists that he either kill the King, take over the kingdom and marry her, or be slain himself. Gyges rules Lydia for twenty-eight years.

Two: As Katharine reads this story to the group of explorers, the English patient wonders if it is for her husband's or for his benefit. Is she trying to communicate a message through this story? Because the English patient is recounting from memory Katharine's reading of Candaules he has information that was not known during the original event. He knows, for example, that he and Katharine will later become lovers. He knows that Katharine's husband Clifton will die. Was the telling of the story of Candaules and the Queen a foreshadowing of what would eventually occur between the English patient and Katharine? Or was this re-telling a re-interpretation of events by the English patient which made the relationship between the story of Candaules and his own experience more coincidental than they really were? Is the truth in the event or in the re-telling of the event? Is it in the doing or in the telling? Or only in the remembering? What significance has a story had on the lives that have been and are being played out?

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[1] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 18.

[2] Kerby , *Narrative and the Self*, 111.

[3] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* , 12.

[4] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 233.

[5] Ibid., 229.

Three: As our reading group discussed this chapter we wondered about the significance of shared stories and the particular significance of reading and talking about literary texts together. Did our reading, and discussion of, *The English Patient* mediate our relations with each other, or did our relations with each other mediate our reading and discussion of *The English Patient*? During our discussion I suggested that Katharine was drawn to the story of Candaules because she was feeling suffocated by her husband's attentions. Anna agreed, and suggested further that Katharine's oral reading was a way of demonstrating, for all present, that the Katharine who had arrived on the plane from England some weeks prior did not exist anymore; living in the desert had changed her. Ruth believed that Katharine's oral reading was an acknowledgement (to herself and to the others) of her sense of sexual power; that her new situation and her new knowledge had given her a greater sense of her own desire and desirability. Ingrid wondered if the reading had not been more innocent — less contrived — but once accomplished created a prophecy that became self-fulfilling. As we puzzled over this chapter we could not help but wonder if we were learning more about the characters in the novel, about our personal reactions to our reading of it, or about each other.

Remembering the Body

> Moments before sleep are when she feels most alive, leaping across fragments of the day, bringing each moment into the bed with her like a child with schoolbooks and pencils. The day seems to have no order until these times, which are like a ledger for her, her body full of stories and situations.[6]

The stories that we tell about our ourselves and our experiences reflect our own history of interactions with others in the world. It is the arrangement of language into narrative forms that gives us a sense of self, and allows others a point of access to that self. Telling stories, listening to them, and reading them (to oneself or to others) gives us access to other worlds, other persons, and other experiences. Interpreting the way in which our interactions with literary texts alters our lived experience helps us to more deeply understand what it is like to exist relationally amid texts and among other readers. It is an act of hermeneutics. This has been my task in the first two chapters of this text, and if my interpretations have been clear I will have demonstrated several things:

First, that the culturally agreed upon forms of the literary text give readers permission to situate themselves amid such texts in a way which invokes and conditions an imaginative response to the text. It is within these imaginative experiences that the reader is able to move beyond her or his daily lived experience into another lived experience as conditioned by the literary text. Second, I have suggested that it is within these imaginative spaces that the reader is able to understand that there is no fixed truth in his or her own circumstances or in the world, for in imagining a possibility there is, at the same time, a negation of what exists. We cannot imagine what it would be like to be in another situation unless we can somehow deny the presence of our existing situation. (We sometimes call this phenomena "suspending disbelief.") The relationship with the literary text, then, is a real experience, and as such, contributes as much to an individual's history of interactions in the world as any non-literary experience. Third, I suggested that the relationships we develop with literary texts become collecting places for various experiences we have had (including our imaginative experiences), and therefore become important narrative and conceptual reference points for our selves. Tapping into these commonplaces becomes a way to trace and locate the way in which we and others are situated in relation to our histories and our present circumstances. Although the character of these commonplaces may vary widely, they all hold the potential to immerse us in the *jouissance* of finding significance for our selves through our marked relationship with the literary text. Fourth, I explained that it is this jouissance which signals the transgression from known symbolic systems into those which have, in some way, dipped below the surface of the symbolic to the place where we are able to find new ways to express old thoughts. This, of course, often leads to new thoughts, new interpretations, and new experiences. Finally, I attempted to present the complexity of what it is like to establish and maintain relations with others, especially as these are mediated by readings and discussions of literary texts. Borrowing from various theorists, I developed an extended metaphor of tracing, mapping, and weaving as a way to show how our relationships with each other and the books we read become woven together into an intricate fabric of lived experience.

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[6] Ibid., 36-37.

But can this metaphor of weaving adequately account for the complexity of these lived relationships? Or is it possible that the relationships which we develop with literary texts and with each other are not merely "woven together" into a fabric of experience?

If the stories told at the beginning of this chapter are any indication of the complexity of the inter-relationships between readers, texts, and each other, it seems that the weaving metaphor is not able to account for the way in which we are continually re-situated among re-interpretations of historical, cultural, literary and experiential narratives. Thinking of these intertextual relations as a fabric is like thinking of them as a jigsaw puzzle in which various experiences are made to fit together. It implies some predetermined plan, rather than the contingent, often serendipitous nature of each of these experiences. It further implies that each thread in the fabric of these intertextual relations can be removed from the whole largely unaltered. This is a misleading image, for we know that once we have had an experience with another person or with a literary text, we cannot leave that experience unchanged. Furthermore, the metaphor of weaving implies that there is some sort of cause/effect relationship between components of lived experiences. There is a sense, for example, that reading a literary text has the ability to *cause* a particular response, action, or experience. Did the reading of Candaules to the group of explorers cause Katharine to think of her husband and the English patient differently? Or was it merely coincidental that at some point following this reading that she and the English patient became lovers? Can we, in any way, locate the beginnings and endings of the way in which our lives become co-implicated with one another and with the literary texts we read?

Readers of *The English Patient* bear witness to the way in which the English patient's identity co-evolves through his relationship with his commonplace book. Neither the book nor he remain the same for having continued a relationship. First Katharine, and later the others at the villa, learn about him by reading this book. *The book matters.* If he had chosen a different book, a different identity would have emerged. Had Katharine and her husband Clifton flown into the Amazon rain forest instead of the Northern African desert their relationship would have evolved differently. Had our reading group read Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*[7] instead of *The English Patient* our relationships with each other would have evolved differently.

It seems that we are transformed by our interactions with texts and with each other. If we imagine that we are a thread in a fabric of a complex web of intertextual experience, we are a thread that cannot remain the same for having been in the fabric. Unlike the silk thread in a tapestry which (more or less) retains its original form when pulled from the fabric, we cannot be pulled out of our current relations unchanged. Nor can the literary texts which are read. They, like us, are different for having been involved in a literary relationship. If this is so, then reading must be understood as more than a *transaction* between reader and text, more than a *fusion of horizons*, more than a *transposition of symbolic systems*. Reading, whether it is done for private or public purposes, must be understood as not only the re-creation of the self, but of the various systems to which that self is relationally bound.

This chapter is meant to function like a hinge, linking the first three with the last three chapters. It is like the spine of a book which, at the same time, functions to bind, to identify, and to separate, for although the first three and the last three chapters are related, they are also distinct from each other. The first three chapters develop the idea of intertextuality around the metaphor of weaving, while the last three depart from this metaphor, developing instead the idea of *co-emergence* in reading and curricular relations. It is in this chapter that I make the transition from weaving to co-emergence by re-describing the development of our cognitive system in terms of a reconceptualized theory of biological evolution. Finally, the concept of reading as embodied action is presented to re-describe the complexity of intertextual relations that include literary readings.

During this writing there were times when there did not seem to be words or images to depict some of the theory that was to be presented. Because of this, the language that has been chosen may occasionally seem somewhat cumbersome. However, I believe that although changes in language are often awkward, they are necessary. Like philosopher Richard Rorty, I feel that an understanding of our situation as human subjects can only change if we consciously endeavor to use our existing language in new and imaginative ways.[8] If our language is, as Rorty suggests, a collection of metaphors which have eventually become "literalized" through common usage (or what Foucault would call "normalized discursive practices"[9]), it seems that the only way to begin to understand any phenomenon differently is to continually re-invent new metaphors. This shall be my task in this chapter: to create new images for depicting what it is like to be relationally involved with a world that includes the reading of literary texts.

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[7] Actually, Margaret Atwood's*Cat's Eye* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) was our second choice, and had it not been for the fact that *The English Patient* had just won the Booker prize, we likely would have read it instead.

The Importance of Skin

> In the Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time. A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin.[10]

Skin is a paradox. It must contain a body and, at the same time, allow the possibility for the body to engage with its environment. Skin reminds us that we are, simultaneously, autonomous and dependent. Most of the time, however, we fail to notice the extraordinary qualities of skin. It is usually only when it is cut, burned, itchy, or ruptured by a sore that we realize that our skin is what separates our inside from the outside. Therefore, more than any other organ, it is skin that reminds us that all of our interactions in the world are embodied.

Of course, it is not only human flesh and bone which are contained by skin. During one of our early discussions of *The English Patient,* we were struck by the frequent and unusual references to skin.

> The book lay on her lap. She realized that for more than five minutes she had been looking at the porousness of the paper, the crease at the corner of page 17 which someone had folded over as a mark. She brushed her hand over its skin.[11]

> Whenever her father was alone with a dog in a house he would lean over and smell the skin at the base of its paw. This, he would say, as if coming away from a brandy snifter is the greatest smell in the world! A bouquet![12]

> She unskins the plum with her teeth, withdraws the stone and passes the flesh of the fruit into his mouth.[13]

She unskins the plum. It was this phrase that provoked a lengthy conversation among us about the unusual syntax Ondaatje had chosen. Why the verb "unskins?" Anna found it most provocative:

> I found it interesting that she "unskinned," not "skinned" the plum. I wondered if it was meant to suggest something ominous about this situation, or if it was meant to be a direct link to the fact that the English patient is so badly burned that he too is unskinned.

What could unskinned really mean? If skinned means what remains when the skin is removed, could unskinned really mean, with its double negative, a skinning which, at the same time, is a rejuvenation of skin? Or was unskinning simply used to catch the reader's attention? In the end we could not decide. However, with this unusual configuration of a common word, a literary location had been announced. A space of indeterminacy had been identified which we individually and collectively worked to understand. For us, the paradox of skin became the ambiguity of unskinned. And it was within this announced ambiguity that we began to wonder about the relations between Hana and the English patient. We began to notice that she was more than just his nurse; she was an inextricable link to a world that barely sustained him.

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[8] In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* Rorty makes use of the philosophy of language developed by Donald Davidson to explain that what we consider "literal" language is primarily a set of "dead metaphors" which have been literalized through common usage and that it is only by inventing new metaphors that we will be able to understand our literalized world differently. (see especially pp. 13-20)

[9] This is a common theme in much of Foucault's work, but is first developed in *The Order of Things.ß*

[10] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 48.

[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Ibid., 8.

[13] Ibid., 4.

It was through our wandering amid the ambiguity announced by "unskinned" that we came to wonder about the significance of skin as a boundary, a locator, and an identifier. For, of course, it was not only living things that required skins. Books also needed skins (covers) in order to be readily identified. This is the outer skin. This outer skin serves as clothing, covering for the many pages, each of which seems to have a "skin" of its own. The feel of the book, we agreed, (the skin of the paper) was just as important as the content of the book. We tended to notice the "feel" of the cover, of the pages. We also agreed that the tendency that some of us had to mark the skin of books by writing on the pages was a deliberate inscribing of experience on skin, not unlike the tattooing of human skin. Ingrid reacted quite strongly to the idea of "marking" the skin of books:

> I hate to see books marked up. For me, it's a desecration.

Is marking the skin of a book the same as unskinning? We decided that it was not, for marking allowed the integrity of the entity to remain intact, whereas unskinning meant some significant transformation of that entity. We also agreed, however, that sometimes unskinning was necessary. It became necessary for Hana to unskin the plum in order for it to become integrated into the English patient's digestive system. For the English patient, the skin of the plum was a barrier, imprisoning the nourishment he needed. With the unskinning, the plum's insides were now on the outside — simultaneously liberated and exposed — not unlike the English patient himself. It could be said that marking the skin (of books or persons) allows the trace of experience to become visible and shows the way identity evolves with experience, whereas the unskinning of the plum and the burning of the English patient's skin remind us that we are simultaneously autonomous and dependent. It is only the thinness of skin that makes the body autonomous. Once the skin is removed, the body must become integrated into its surroundings. Just as the plum, once unskinned, will soon cease to exist as a plum, so too will the English patient soon cease to exist as a viable and autonomous physical entity.

We could say, then, that marking and tattooing show lived experience while unskinning marks the end of autonomous lived experience. Marking leaves a trace, a track, a trail. It declares ownership, identity, relationship. Unskinning removes the trace, erases autonomy and dependence. Unskinning repudiates the idea that the human body is Other to the world.

It is interesting to notice how little we think of our own skins, of our own bodies inside these skins, and of the way our bodies are an integral part of our environment. We live in a culture that is simultaneously enamoured with and dismissive of the body. Although we appear to be obsessed with its appearance, we have not been very successful at understanding the way in which our bodies are ecologically caught up in and with our environment. More specifically, we do not seem to really believe that our body *is* an environment in itself. Although many of us believe that the body houses something we might call the mind and/or the soul, we usually forget that it is always part of the environment with which others must interact. As discussed in the previous chapter, our bodies, and the bodies of others with whom we form relations, are necessarily changed through and with our worldly interactions. Unfortunately, modernity has taught us to ignore the body, to believe that our bodies are something which *live in*, but are not really *part of*, various locations. But, of course, as Merleau-Ponty has suggested, we are an inextricable part of the unity of the world. And, as such, the very ecology of our lived experiences bears examination.

This is precisely what biologists and cognitive theorists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela have attempted in reporting their studies in evolutionary biology and human cognition. In their book, *The Tree of Knowledge*,[14] they investigate the way in which human subjects have come to know, arguing that popular theories of the way in which human cognitive systems develop have largely ignored biological history and the way in which this history is embedded in our current physiological, ecological, social, political and cultural structures. Beginning with a reconceptualization of Darwin's theories of evolution, they develop a theory of cognition which suggests that our current condition as human subjects is dependent upon our biological and ecological history of interactions on the planet. At the same time, our planet (environment) is always co-implicated in human action, and therefore bears the mark of evolving human cognition. In order to help us to understand the applications of this post-

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[14] Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987).

Darwinian theory of evolutionary biology to human cognition, they have defined several theoretical principles which serve as conceptual collectors for this new thinking. The language used to describe these concepts has been further elaborated in Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch's book *The Embodied Mind*[15] where the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and traditional zen Buddhist philosophy are integrated.

My decision to incorporate this work into a discussion of shared reading and the school curriculum emerges principally from the fact that I read these texts alongside our group's reading of *The English Patient* — and particularly during our discussions of, and my personal reflections on, the "unskinning" trope. Over the several months that I continued to re-read the novel and to think about skin as a boundary that both separates and identifies us as individuals interacting in an ecological world, I continued to think about the significance of the studies in perception which guided Maturana and Varela and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's work. At the same time, I was involved in another reading group where we were painstakingly working our way through Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. And so, like Hana in the English Patient I was situated in horizontal and vertical readings of text which always co-existed and co-evolved with my relations with others in the world. Although I was having an individual experience with each text, I was also experiencing the reading of one text *in relation to* the others. In a sense, all of these texts became one. It could be said that these texts had become *unskinned*. And so, it is not unusual that with this writing I continue my reading and interpretation of these texts as part of my project of developing a deeper understanding of what it means to read literary texts with other persons.

Re-Reading Darwin

Maturana and Varela help us to understand that all of our experience of the world is inextricably connected to our physiological structure. The organizational structure of our bodies fundamentally affects the way that we are in the world. Moreover, our own history of actions in the world (biological, social, cultural), as well as those of our forebears, affects how the world appears to us. In order to better understand what we call our *cognitive* system — our way of knowing — we need to understand not only how we function biologically in the world, but how the biological structure we call our body continually evolves *with* the world and how the world, at the same time, evolves with our bodies.

Although this may already sound quite logical, it is not generally the way that we think about our human/world relations. In fact, much of the language that we use to discuss any changing relationship among persons and/or things indicates that we have trouble understanding that learning always co-emerges with living through experiences. When thinking about human relationships such as marriage, for example, we tend to talk about the way in which it might *ideally* evolve: "You need to get to *know* your partner before you make a commitment!" We say this as if the person's identity is somehow something static that we can learn about in the absence of our shared lived experience. In reading theory we talk about *schematic* learning where teachers are encouraged to help students develop scaffolding structures based on their own experience in order to more effectively learn new material. Again, there seems to be a deliberate forgetting of the way in which *all* of these previous memories and experiences are altered by the ongoing action among persons and texts in the school classroom. Educational discourse generally speaks in terms of *ideal* states, *optimal* learning, and *maximized* efficiency, all of which are often defined in the absence of discussions of the human/world relations which necessarily circumscribe all cognitive development.

According to Maturana and Varela, much of our disembodied talk about living and learning arises from our belief that we can actually subtract ourselves from our world when talking about it or ourselves. Furthermore, they suggest that there is a deeply embedded cultural belief in the idea of *survival of the fittest*. In part, this is a consequence of the cultural internalization of a particular interpretation of Charles Darwin's theory of *natural selection*. It is conventionally believed, for example, that evolution is a process through which the environment *chooses* some organisms for survival over others because those organisms have more optimal traits. Given this view, it is not surprising that the environment is understood as "giving directions" for particular paths of evolution.

In *The Tree of Knowledge*, Maturana and Varela outline a view of evolution which they suggest is better able to account for the complexity, diversity, and tangled interrelationships among organisms and between organisms and the environments in which they are contained. They suggest that in order for any living organism to survive it must successfully co-exist with an environment through a process called *structural coupling*. They help us to understand that when a living entity is structurally coupled with the medium that contains it, it may *seem* to the observer that it is functioning according to directions given by the environment, but it is actually functioning within a choreography of congruent disturbances in which one is influenced by the other. It is only when the mutual disturbances from each entity and its environment become *congruent* can they be said to be structurally coupled. It can be seen then, that the very structure of any entity *and* the environment that contains it are always affected by the way in which they disturb each other.

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[15] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*.

Of course, this all becomes incredibly complex since structural coupling between entities and environments occurs at various levels and is continuous. The important point for this discussion is that, biologically speaking, it is inaccurate to suggest that living entities are *determined* by their environments — that is, they do not develop in order to *optimally fit* their environment. Rather, structural coupling is contingent upon whatever conditions happen to be present. A living entity survives not because it has developed an *ideal form*, but rather because it has developed an *adequate* form to allow structural coupling to continue. Structural coupling, then, can be understood as an ongoing dialectic between living entities and their environment where each simultaneously determines the other through the process of living together.

The idea of structural coupling (or mutual specification) is a dramatic shift from our conventional understanding of Darwinian theory, for it rejects the idea that living forms are determined or adapted by some process of ideal trait selection. Rather, it presents structural change as a necessary function of a complex mutual relationship between living entities and their environment. This leads to several important conclusions: First, whether or not an environmental disturbance will prompt a response from an organism is a function of the organisms's structure (as determined by its hisotiry, biology, and context). Although changes are *triggered* by the environment, the structural adaptation is determined by the previous history and current structure in the living unity. Second, although living entities trigger changes in the environment, it is the structure of the environment, as determined by *its* prior history of mutual specification that will determine the structural changes which this disturbance triggers. Changes in the environment are not *determined* by a living entity that lives in it, but rather the environment reacts according to what is *possible* because of its history of structural coupling. In other words, we could say that both living entities and the environments are *structure determined:* they are limited by their previous history of interactions with each other. Third, this continual process of structural coupling has no discernible beginning or end points. One cannot say whether the environment or the entity has made the first or the last disturbance. Like the hermeneutic circle of understanding, the structural changes between organism and environment exist in a continual circle of evolution.

This process of evolution is what Maturana and Varela call *natural drift*. For them, natural drift is meant to signify the serendipitous path that evolution follows. They suggest that

> Evolution is somewhat like a sculptor with wanderlust: he [or she] goes through the world collecting a thread here, a hunk of tin there, a piece of wood here, and he [or she] combines them in a way that their structure and circumstance allow, with no reason other than what is able to combine them.[16]

Understanding evolution as *natural drift* simply means that living entities are neither determined by their environment, nor do they determine their environment. Rather, through the necessary process of structural coupling which is required to maintain equilibrium between the two, each specifies the other. Using the word *drift* helps to signify the variability of this evolution. Although always constrained by each other, (living entity and environment), the direction that evolution may take greatly varies depending upon the particular conditions at any given time in the history of ongoing structural coupling. Maturana and Varela equate natural drift to the many possible paths drops of water may take if hundreds of handfuls are thrown from the summit of a hill. Although each handful of droplets will fall depending upon the particular relationship that it has with infinite environmental contingencies, particular "lines" or patterns will become evident after some time. These patterns are never pre-determined or "selected" by the environment, but instead represent the number of "possible" variants emerging from ongoing structural coupling. The most important point for this discussion is that "what an environment is cannot be separated from what organisms are and what they do."[17] The environment is as much a reflection of the biology of the species as the species is a reflection of the environment.

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[16] Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*.

Contrary to popular interpretations of Darwinian evolutionary theory, Varela et al. suggest that the evolution of living beings is more the result of a process of satisfying the conditions necessary for the integrity of the living entity to be maintained. Put simply, biological evolution does not wait for an optimal solution — a best fit. It accepts whatever allows life to go on. Varela et al. use the metaphor of *bricolage* to account for this phenomenon, where bricolage is understood as "the putting together of parts and items in complicated arrays, not because they fulfill some ideal design but simply because they are possible."[18] "Good enough" forms, not ideal ones, are all that are necessary for the maintenance of structural coupling.

This, I believe, is an important point, for it means that living entities do not remain viable because optimal genetic structures are selected, but instead because they maintain a structure which is *possible*. This means that the process of evolutionary drift is more about *discarding* those traits which would compromise the viability of the living entity than of selecting traits that would ensure its viability. By thinking of evolution as a process of discarding, rather than selecting, it becomes clear that what remains after discarding allows for greater diversity than what remains after optimal selection, especially when the goal of evolution is understood in terms of "good enough" rather than optimal processes. "Good enough" must not be seen as something which is less desirable or mediocre, but rather as a process which encourages variation by maintaining as much diversity as possible. "Good enough" means a temporary fixing of the minimal conditions for the *necessary*, while maintaining a broad range of resources in anticipation of the *possible*.

Re-Reading The Joke

What implications do structural coupling and evolutionary drift have for understanding the development of human intelligence and human action in the world? How are what we perceive, what we learn (know) and what we do caught up in each other? What significance does a "good enough" theory of evolution help us to understand the human cognitive system?

In chapter three a description of Kip's talent for bomb disposal was presented. It was suggested that this talented was largely a result of his ability to see what others could not see, to perceive differently.

> He was by nature conservative but also able to imagine the worst devices, the capacity for accident in a room — a plum on a table, a child approaching and eating the pit of poison, a man walking into a dark room and before joining his wife in bed brushing loose a paraffin lamp from its bracket. Any room was full of such choreography.[19]

And, of course, seeing a usually invisible choreography, (or looking for the joke of the bomb) meant imagining the possible, rather than the probable:

> Bombs were attached to taps, to the spines of books, they were drilled into fruit trees so an apple falling onto a lower branch would detonate the tree, just as a hand gripping that branch would. He was unable to look at a room or field without seeing the possibilities of weapons there.[20]

Kip, then, seemed to be able to see what others could not see. Or, we could say that he somehow saw things differently. It was this capacity to see things differently that seemed to allow him success at bomb disposal. How can we explain Kip's remarkable talent in terms of what we know and believe about human cognition?

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch[21] carefully detail two commonly accepted theories of human cognition: *cognition as representation* and *cognition as an emergent system*. They then carefully outline a theory of *cognition as embodied action* which is largely developed around the ideas of *structural coupling* and *natural drift*. The three "re-readings" of Kip's talent for "finding the joke" which follow demonstrate the significant differences between these three views of cognition.

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[17] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, 198.

[18] Ibid., 196.

[19] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 111.

[20] Ibid., 75.

[21] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*.

One: Emerging from a metaphor of *mind as computer or information processing device*, this view of cognition suggests that the formulation of meaning by human subjects is the result of a process of learning how to effectively use symbols which represent a world that is independent of the knower. The central idea is that intelligence so resembles computation in its essential characteristics that human cognition can be characterized in terms of computation of symbolic processes in much the same way the operation of computers is defined. From this point of view, intelligent behavior presupposes the ability to develop an accurate internal representation of an external world. This has become our "commonsense" view of cognition where thought consists of physical, symbolic computations leading to successful action and interaction in a pre-given world. Similar to Darwinian evolutionary theory, the subject is "determined" by the environment, and is seen as more or less successful depending upon the suitability of the response to particular conditions. Improving cognitive capacity or functioning is seen as achieving a more "optimal fit" between what is needed for successful action and what is possible (cognitively) by the subject.

The popularity of this view can be discerned in our metaphorical descriptions of cognition as *information processing*, solving problems as *computing data*, and the act of remembering as *retrieving information*. Words are thought of as locations for meaning; meaning, in turn, is transmitted from one cognizing agent to another in order for communication to occur.[22] For cognitivists the mind is located in the brain, which is understood as a storage place and processing centre for knowledge.

If we believe that our cognition is a process of symbolically representating a reality that exists independent of our perception of it, we might say that Kip has been "trained" to see differently, and that any person who is sufficiently capable and motivated would be able to learn the skills necessary to engage in this sort of behavior. Noticing a different choreography of place might be understood as being the result of having experienced an alternate symbolization of the world. Kip's talent, then, could be understood as a combination of experience and direct instruction which has altered his perceptual schema in ways which would prepare him to receive and process information differently. Kip could be described as having been *programmed* to be able to locate and process information leading to accurate location of well-hidden bombs.

Hermeneutically, we might situate ourselves with the early hermeneuts who believed that interpretation was largely a process of getting the meaning of a text *right* in order to promote a deeper understanding of it.[23] From this perspective, "getting it right" for Kip would mean de-coding the joke. This would have been made possible by his familiarity with particular symbolic formulations which he was able to manipulate, in creative ways, in order to solve the problem presented to him. Speaking behaviouristically, his reward could be positive reinforcement (self-satisfaction or admiration of peers) or negative reinforcement (not getting blown up). Basically, then, Kip's ability could be interpreted as an act of creative symbolic decoding and processing in order to meet particular contextual challenges.

It is interesting how natural and right this interpretation sounds. Although words like *processing* emerge from a mind as computer metaphor, they no longer function as metaphors, but rather as literalized truths. Most of us would not question this usage since our conception of learning is now well-entrenched in this once-metaphorical thinking. But can this view of cognition as the processing of symbolic representations of a world really account for this complex act of creative interpretation? If this is the way in which learning really occurs, why is it that only a very few soldiers who were trained in the same way as Kip were able to demonstrate his proficiency? Was their deficiency merely due to a lack of interest and motivation? Not likely, since failure to find the joke of the bomb meant certain death. Perhaps, then, they lacked *talent*. Could it be that the interpretation required of an effective sapper was not something that could be simply learned, but required talent? If so, what is this mystical thing that we call "talent" or "innate ability" to which we refer when the computer metaphor fails us. Is talent a genetic predisposition or is it a culturally acquired one? Nature or nurture?

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[22] This of course is represented by the popular "conduit" model of communication offered in many language arts textbooks.

[23] For a concise explication of the history of hermeneutics see Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern, 1969).

Two: Rather than understanding the brain as a central processing device, thinking about cognition as an *emergent system* means understanding intelligent action as the result of global properties emerging from the interaction of various neuronal networks in the brain. These neuronal networks are thought of as *pre-symbolic*, which means that they do not depend upon symbolic representation of a world in order to exist. Through their evolving interaction with one another these complex neuronal networks become self-organized into what cognitive theorist Marvin Minsky has called "societies of the mind."[24]

This "society" metaphor has become a useful way to describe the way in which various systems such as genetic networks, immune systems, and ecological systems work, for it describes a process of interaction where new properties emerge from the interaction of already existing, self-organizing components. When the word *society* is used to describe the cognitive system, it becomes apparent that learning is not seen as de-coding a pre-given world as represented symbolically, but rather is the result of inter-connected neuronal behaviour which, within each organism, *self-organizes*, in order to create a system which is functional. This understanding of intelligence is founded upon a metaphor of *construction* rather than *representation*. The cognitive system is not thought to be a linear system whereby various levels of symbolic processing *intersect* in order to allow effective action in the world, but rather a system which functions to enable the emergence of various new global properties from an established, but *ever-evolving* complex network of autonomous components working in the organism. Cognition is not understood as something which is *determined by an external world*, but rather as a system which is generated *internally* in response to some aspects of the world (but not others). In other words, intelligence is more than the sum of the parts which produce it.

How might a "society of mind" view of the cognitive system explain Kip's abilities?

Unlike the other sappers who are selected by Lord Suffolk to comprise the bomb disposal unit, Kip has been raised outside of Great Britain. Although his native India was a British colony, his history of experiences as a child and young adult differed significantly from his fellow British soldiers' experiences. We learn, for example, that in India, no piece of machinery is ever discarded:

> He had come from a country where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits. Cars were never destroyed. Parts of them were carried across a village and re-adapted into a sewing machine or water pump. The backseat of a Ford was reupholstered and became a sofa. Most people in his village were more likely to carry a spanner or screwdriver than a pencil.[25]

If the mind is understood as a society, Kip's talent could be explained as an ability that emerged from a cultural and social need which provoked a particular and situationally specific interaction among neuronal networks in the brain. Because mechanical innovations were desired in his native India where there was a shortage of materials, the ability to re-invent useful artifacts from old — to see a new choreography amid a pre-given one — could be described as the *construction* of specific abilities to meet particular environmental needs. Therefore, although his ability *seems* as though it is the product of innate talent, a society of mind theory of cognition would suggest that his effectiveness at discerning the joke in the bomb was possible because of the *history of environmental stimuli* during his lifetime on the complex society of components comprising his mind. If he is good at adapting to the challenges presented, he will live to utilize these new adaptations on the next bomb. Again, however, the mind is seen in the service of the world. Because this explanation represents our commonsense view of the operation of a cognitive system as something developed *in the brain*, it too sounds wonderfully sensible and logical. But is it really?

Although a view of cognition as a society rejects the idea that the cognitive system is the result of symbolic processing, in general it is still more alike than different from theories of cognition as representation, for it also suggests that the environment and learner arise *independently* of one another. Although they are involved in a *relationship* with each other, it is the learner who is seen as adapting (hopefully optimally) to a particular environment. It is important to understand that even though society of mind theories have helped us appreciate the complexity of the relationships that comprise the human cognitive system, they have not accounted for two things: First, the possibility that emergent properties from these self-organizing systems are not optimal solutions to environmental demands. Second, that the history of emergent global states of any organism's system of cognition fundamentally affects the way in which it is able to act on the world. Therefore, although these theories have more successfully accounted for the complexity of cognition, they still evolve from a fundamental belief in the *optimization* of forms for the purpose of *adapting* to the ongoing demands of particular environments.

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[24] Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

[25] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 188.

Three: What happens when we think of Kip's ability in terms of a theory of *embodied action* as derived from a theory of evolution as natural drift? In order to clearly distinguish their theory of cognition from other theories, Varela et al. have aligned cognition with the phrase "embodied action" to illuminate two important points:

> First, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context. By using the term action we mean to emphasize ... that sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition. Indeed the two are not merely contingently linked in individuals; they have evolved together.[26]

Their theory of cognition as embodied action (enaction) may be philosophically grounded in the phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty who, in *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Primacy of Perception*[27] insisted that all human knowledge was necessarily embodied in the world.[28] Epistemological questions for Merleau-Ponty were always questions of ontological embodiment (i.e. to know is to know through a body which exists historically, temporally, spatially in a world). Varela et al explicitly align their theory of enaction with Merleau-Ponty's belief in the inextricability of world and subject:

> The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects.[29]

It is this sense of "double embodiment" (i.e. our bodies are both biological structures and phenomenological-experiential structures) which formed the basis for Merleau-Ponty's insistence that in order to understand our lived situation we needed to more explicitly acknowledge the ongoing dialectic between our physiological structure (body) and its relationship to its surroundings in any discussion of mind or self

Cognition as embodied action is also philosophically closely aligned with the work of Merleau-Ponty's contemporaries, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. It was Heidegger who insisted that philosophy must move away from a preoccupation with knowing into an ongoing reflection on "being."[30] In *Being*

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[26] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, 172-173.

[27] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 1964).

[28] In his essay "The Child's Relations With Others," in *The Primacy of Perception*, (pp. 96-155), Merleau-Ponty highlights the essence of the bodily relationship that we have to the world and to each other: "The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself" (p. 152). In this essay, Merleau-Ponty becomes very Sartrian (see chapter three), reinforcing Sartre's idea that we can only know our Selves through the relations that we have with others, and the others can only know themselves through their relations with us. It is indeed a continual circle of understanding.

[29] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 430 as cited in *The Embodied Mind*, 4.

[30] For Heidegger, "Being" forms the ontological ground for all human understanding. He defines it as "Being is always the Being of an entity" (in *Basic Writings*, 1977, p. 29). By this he means that Being is different from being in that Being is the opening created in being through which all objects may

and Time[31] he laid the groundwork for a philosophy which refuted the notion that philosophy was able to find some univocal truth outside of lived experience. Instead, Heidegger believed that the only way that human beings could find truth was in the freedom found in the exploration of multiple understandings and orientations to truth. Heidegger's greatest contribution to philosophy was his insistence that ontology and history are inseparable; human subjects come to understand only within ever-evolving present moments which are always the terminal point of everything that has come before. For Heidegger, then, truth was not something which could be fixed or located after the fact; truth was the ongoing project of coming to understanding of human existence in each present moment. Most relevant for this discussion is Heidegger's idea that the essential aspect of humanness is the ability to think about one's existence. For him, thinking is never a closed system, but rather, is the traveling of a road. Each thinker goes a way that is uniquely her or his own as determined by the ongoing historical relationship between one's own existence and the world into which one has been thrown. For Heidegger neither the world nor the being who knows is determined by the other; they are, rather, *co-determined* in the dialectical relationship between the human subject and his or her relation to the world.[32]

Because Gadamer's life-long philosophical project has been to extend Heidegger's philosophy to a hermeneutics which tries to discern the conditions necessary to make understanding of being possible, it provides important philosophical support for a theory of cognition as embodied action. Most well known for his phrase *fusion of horizons* which refers to the coming to agreement or the arrived at "meaning" in the process of conversation between two differently situated consciousnesses, Gadamer helps us to more clearly understand how truth does not exist *in* the world but is continually fixed and unfixed in our ongoing relationships *with* a world.[33] For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not about locating or fixing truth; rather, it is about the ongoing process of understanding the conditions necessary for understanding to occur.

What Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Gadamer share is the belief that human beings do not act on an objective world, nor that the world acts upon humans as objects. The central insight to be gained from hermeneutic and phenomenological studies is that knowledge is not something which is pre-given in the world — it is not embedded in the world waiting to be located. Nor is knowledge embedded inside some essential *inner-self* which can be revealed through introspection. Instead, knowledge is viewed as something which emerges from our ongoing interpretations necessary for successful action in an ever-evolving world. Varela et al. suggest that in order for us to better understand our lived situation as human subjects a continuing dialogue between Continental philosophy and cognitive science must develop:

> The challenge posed by cognitive science to the Continental discussions ... is to link the study of human experience as culturally embodied with the study of human cognition in neuroscience, linguistics and cognitive psychology. In contrast, the challenge posed to cognitive science is to question one of the more entrenched assumptions of our scientific heritage — that the world is independent of the knower.[34]

This suggests that cognition must not be thought of as a process through which the human subject attempts closer and closer approximations of a received world, but rather as a process by which cognitive systems and the world are *mutually specified*. We neither determine our world, nor are determined by it, but co-emerge *with* a world. It is the idea of *co-emergence* which which becomes the pivotal

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become present. In other words, what distinguishes human beings from other living entities is that human beings are able to reflect on their own existence. Human beings have the capacity to think about what it is to "be."

[31] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Mcquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

[32] In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 283-318, Heidegger suggests that each thinker goes a way that is uniquely her or his own, and that this way is built through questioning. He suggests that "Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is a way of thinking" (p. 283). By this, he means that it is the *way* and not the individual person that assembles what is thought that provides the structure of a person's thinking and allows her him to see everything in a particular relation to everything else.

[33] As described in *Truth and Method*, 306-307.

[34] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, 150.

concept in a theory of cognition as embodied action.

Situated as it is between post-Darwinian evolutionary theory and the Continental philosophic traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology, cognition as embodied action asserts that cognition is a system of intelligence which *brings forth* a world of understanding. Simply put, human intelligence is not seen as the ability to know a fixed, stable, truthful world; rather, intelligence is understood as the ability to maintain viability with an ever-evolving world. What we call our cognitive system is not something which is *innate*, nor is it something which is *determined* by a world. It is, instead, a system which develops from our *history of interactions* with our world. The world *co-evolves* with its subjects.

The importance of historical interaction to sensory perception is described by neurologist Oliver Sacks,[35] in his story of Virgil who, through surgery, became sighted after nearly a lifetime of blindness. As the bandages were lifted off, Virgil did not, as we might expect, jump up and exclaim "I can see!" He did not, because, although he was now aware of a profusion of light, colour, shape and texture, his history of blindness meant that he was unable to draw out meaningful images. In effect, Virgil could not see. For him, seeing required months of living through a now-visual world and in fact, even though physiologically vision was possible, it was never fully attained. His previous history of blindness seemed to exclude the possibility for him to re-develop his cognitive system to account for this newly acquired physiological ability. This example helps us to understand that what we see is more a matter of what we have learned to see rather than an internal representation of the world. What we perceive, then, is a version of the world that we have brought forth through our history of interactions with others in particular contexts and situations. This ultimately has biological consequences, for as Varela et al. suggest:

> the vastly different histories of structural coupling for birds, fishes, insects, and primates have enacted or brought forth different perceived worlds of color. Therefore, our perceived world of color should not be considered to be the optimal "solution" to some evolutionarily posed "problem." Our perceived world of color is, rather, a result of one possible and viable phylogenic pathway among many others realized in the evolutionary history of living beings.[36]

This helps us to understand why all cultures do not see the same colors. It is not that what is out there is different; rather, it is that our experience of living teaches us how to see — and at the same time, because our experience emerges from a body which has a prior history of learning (including an inherited genetic structure), seeing color is always the product of an historically, culturally and biologically conditioned set of lived experiences with the world which contains us. What we see, then, is more a result of what our history of structural coupling (both as an individual and as a member of a human species which has a history of genetic evolution) allows us to see. This is why it is useful to think of perception as "bringing forth" a world of seeing, hearing, tasting, and so on, rather than "representing" the world as it "really is." In fact, the colloquial language we use about perception betrays our intuitive understanding of this theory of perception. When we say that we must "acquire a taste" for a particular food, "develop an eye for art, an ear for music, a feel for painting" we demonstrate our sense of needing to "learn" to perceive in ways that allow our relations with our environment (cultural, social, physical) to be maintained.

At this point it becomes apparent that cognition as embodied action is most closely aligned with the post-Darwinian view of evolutionary theory presented earlier, since its most important theoretical point is that the cognitive system evolves through a process of *evolutionary drift* which is determined by a living entity's *history of structural coupling*. This suggests that the cognitive system is not determined by its environment through some process of natural selection in which optimal survival traits are selected, but rather that the cognitive system evolves through a process of attaining a *good enough* fit. Cognition is seen as a collection of capabilities that are organized together not because they are *ideal* but simply because they are *possible*.

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[35] Oliver Sacks, "A Neurologists's Notebook: To See and Not See," *The New Yorker,* 10 May 1993, 59-73.

[36] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind,* 183.

Aligning the development of cognitive systems with the idea of evolutionary drift is an important conceptual breakthrough in our understanding of the way in which cognitive systems function since it helps us to understand that the development of intelligence is more a process of *discarding* than *optimizing.* Varela et al. suggest that:

> The task in evolutionary biology is to change the logical geography of the debate by studying the tangled, circular relations of congruence among items to be explained. The first step is to switch from a *prescriptive* logic to a *proscriptive* one, that is, from the idea that what is not allowed is forbidden to the idea that what is not forbidden is allowed.[37]

This shift in thinking helps us to understand the great diversity among various species within one habitat, among members of any one species, and of the cognitive systems which are developed within any of these. The most important point for this discussion is, however, the fact that understanding cognition in terms of evolutionary drift — as a process of *satisfying* rather than *optimizing* — makes it clear that neither the idea of natural selection in evolutionary biology, nor the idea of cognition as representation of a pre-given world are desirable, for in each of these is embedded the notion of an ideal form — some logical endpoint. If living entities were actually made to conform to ideal forms their long-term survival would be seriously compromised, for we know that environmental conditions are never stable, are always contingent, and it is the organism or the cognitive system which is best able to maintain a relationship with an environment that will be able to survive. Understanding cognition as embodied action, then, suggests that it is preferable to maintain diversity in the system through a process of developing "good enough" forms, than to attempt refined systems of ideal forms, since the former is more likely able to deal with unforeseen and evolving environmental contingencies than the latter.

In order to reconceptualize Kip's ability to interpret the choreography of a bomb, we need to remember that a theory of cognition as embodied action asks that we believe that there is no direct correspondence between our perception of the world and the way that the world "really is." Because of our species-specific history of structural coupling leading to a particular path of understanding, what we perceive as a species is not the same as what other species might perceive. Our perceptual systems have not evolved in *response* to a pre-given world, nor has our world been *determined* by our perceptually guided action. What we are *able* to perceive has co-emerged with the world that contains us. At the same time, individuals within our species are the product of a particular genetic biological unity, which, in turn, is the product of hundreds of generations of our forebears who have been structurally coupled with particular environments. As Varela et al. suggest, we do not merely inherit the gene pool, we *inherit the environments* which have been structurally coupled with a gene pool.[38] Our genetic heritage, therefore, is *inscribed* with previous worlds. Genetic material is not merely a *blueprint,* it is a *collecting place* for history, much like the English patient's commonplace book.

When Kip walks into a room, what he sees (which of course conditions what understandings are possible) is wholly determined by the way in which he embodies a cumulative history of co-determination between his ontogenic (lived history) and phylogenic (species specific history) structural couplings with a world. As he surveys the room he does not simply *perceive* a world, he *brings forth* a world of significance. He will see and understand things that others do not. The most important point, for this discussion, is that this world which he brings forth, in some way, must be able to co-exist with the worlds brought forth by those with whom he co-exists. There must be a convergence in order for there to be a shared world of significance. Therefore, Kip engages in what Madeleine Grumet[39] has called actions of "pointing to the world" in order for others whom he is with to begin to understand the significance of his world.

Simply put, a theory of cognition as embodied action suggests that having a body that occupies space in a medium with which it must maintain an ongoing relationship is inextricable from the cognitive system which develops. Body and mind may never be considered apart from one another, for it is the body, not some sense of the mind which takes up space in the world. Every action, every experience, every movement, matters to the development of the cognitive system. It is only when we become "harmonized" (some might say socialized) with our medium that we believe that the *mind* is in charge of the relationship between world and self. Any rupture or breach of this harmony — such as a broken leg, a trip to a foreign country, the sudden death of a loved one — jolts us into an awareness of how our sense of self is totally dependent on *all* of our relational connections to the world and to each other.

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[37] Ibid., 195.

[38] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind.*

[39] Madeleine Grumet, "Lost Places, Potential Spaces and Possible Worlds: Why We Read Books With Other People," *Margins, 1* (Spring, 1991), 35-53.

Kip's unusual expertise at bomb disposal, then, is not simply the result of his own history of interactions in a world that required mechanical innovation. He indeed does have *talent,* which, in part emerges from the fact that his physiological condition is the result of his forebears' interactions in particular environments. What we call *heredity* must also be understood as the collecting point for human *history* in the world. Therefore, we must understand that although Kip, like any other human subject, can *choose* to interact with his environment in many ways, he will *always* be a structure-determined creature. This simply means that his own genetic and experiential histories of structural coupling with particular co-emerging environments, through a process of evolutionary drift, has resulted in a *particular* cognitive system that becomes part of the ecological unity of the planet. Therefore, although we can say that Kip is structure-determined, we must also understand that the environment in which he exists is also structure-determined. Successful cognitive action simply means maintaining a viable, co-emerging relationship between the two. For Kip, this means successfully de-fusing the bomb.

Reading as Unskinning

How can an understanding of cognition as embodied action help us to further interpret the the three stories presented at the beginning of this chapter?

We might say, first of all, that the Queen's immediate and accurate assessment of Gyges' motive for hiding in her bed chamber was not a lucky guess. A theory of embodied action helps us to understand that her correct interpretation was likely possible because of her history of interactions with her husband, Candaules. In fact, after years of living with him, and bringing forth a world of understanding with him, her *perception* of the world, and her developed intellectual capabilities were likely very much like his. We might say, that over the years, they had *grown* to understand *together.* We could also say that it was precisely this collectively held understanding that ultimately proved to be deadly for Candaules. Years of sharing a life had promoted *unskinning*.

What about Katharine's re-telling of the story? We must understand, first of all, that Katharine was not reading this story in a vacuum. Her reading of the story was necessarily contained amid numerous other texts and experiences. In fact, the story of Candaules was situated in various layers of contextualized narratives: it was embedded within a collection of stories called *The Histories.* This particular version of *The Histories* was the product of many years of evolution with the English patient who had made it his commonplace book. In no way could he and the book be separated. *Unskinning again.* This, in turn, was being read by Katharine within the context of a particular set of human and environmental relations that *co-evolved* with her reading and interpretation of this story. It could be said, then, that when Katharine read this story aloud, she began to understand her relationship with her husband differently, not because of some moral in the story, but because her current relational situation required her to make decisions which were not necessarily optimal, but instead sufficient for her emotional well-being. In other words, Katharine was unable to read about Candaules in the absence of the evolving lived experiences she had and was having. Her reading, like any reading, was not merely a vertical reading of one text, it was a horizontal reading of multiple texts of already lived and current experience. *More unskinning.*

And what of our reading group's understanding of Katharine's reading of Candaules? It, of course, was simultaneously affected by the complex set of intertextual relations of these layered stories and our own history of interactions in the world, both in and out of the context of our reading group. In other words, it was finally impossible to say whether our experiences prior to reading and interpretation gave the story meaning, or whether our interpretations gave new meaning to our own lives.

Unskinning.

Reading was not something that was simply *transposed* onto existing human relations; the reading and interpretation of this passage became an inextricable part of the environment with which each of us were attempting to remain structurally coupled. This helps us to understand that reading and interpreting literary texts, within our literate culture, is an integral part of our species specific (i.e., human) experience. In other words, reading doesn't just change the way we think and act; it affects, in every way, *who we are*. And if reading affects who we are, it necessarily affects what we *know* and what we *do*. We could say, then, that the experience of reading has not only altered us *phenomenologically*, it has altered us *biologically*.

This is an interesting idea, for it prompts us to wonder whether the very organization and structure of our *bodies* is altered because we read literary texts. Is it possible that generations of literacy has changed us biologically? A theory of reading as embodied action would tend to suggest that this is likely the case for, like anything in the world, the reading of literary texts is not merely something *added* to already fixed and established relations in the world which are untouched by reading. Literary readings become an inextricable part of our daily embodied action in the world and, therefore, fundamentally change *all* of the relations that we have with that world.

Unskinning.

How can the idea of reading as embodied action help us to better understand our involvement in the complex act of reading and hermeneutic interpretations of our reading? What can the history of literary reading and literary criticism teach us about the idea of *enactive* (embodied) reading?

Walter Ong[40] helps us to understand that, with the invention of the printing press and eventual education of greater numbers of persons, the literary text became seen (particularly in the Western world) as a way in which to educate upcoming generations about historical facts and cultural traditions. Therefore, in addition to serving as an aesthetically pleasing art form, the literary text was thought to enable cultural transmission. Much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary criticism attempted to explicate the "meaning" of a literary work in light of its historical circumstances of writing. Interpretation meant not only the "fixing" of meaning in the text, but fixing the text in particular historical period.[41]

At about the turn of the century, a group of theorists endeavored to extract literary texts from their historical circumstances and develop a method of criticism which would enable readers to perform "close readings" of texts.[42] Adopting the name the "new criticism" they believed that meaning was embedded in the literary text, and that this meaning could be extracted by any reader who closely attended to what the text was saying. Words were considered symbols and it was the capable reader's task to be able to interpret these symbolic structures (words) into a "truthful" meaning. Attempting to discern what the author may have meant in the historical circumstances of writing was the "intentional fallacy," while describing meaning in terms of the affect of the text on the reader was the "affective fallacy."[43] The text was seen as authoritative in itself; authors no longer existed for the reader, and the reader was reduced to an excavator of already-present meaning.

The work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure,[44] however, altered the landscape of literary criticism and, in some ways, many of the ideas about the significance of reading the literary text. For Saussure, words were no longer seen as entities which "contained" some inherent truthful meaning in themselves. Rather, words could only be known by the way in which they differed from other words. The relationship between signifier and signified depended upon the way in which this relationship was positioned within any discourse. Meaning could not be located in words, but rather in the structure of combinations of words. Literary structuralism was modeled after this and, particularly with the work of Northrop Frye,[45] literary meaning began to be defined in terms of the organization of the text—the metaphors, archetypes and tropes that provided the "form" for the text. Meaning was therefore seen as emerging from particular *structures,* and so it was more important to notice the structure than the particularity of words. Again, however, the text was de-historicized, and meaning was seen to reside in the structure of the text rather than in the reader. Even so, literary structuralism was a very important conceptual shift from new critical theory for it helped to show that meaning could never be considered apart from form. Unfortunately, although form and content were now married, the reader still remained divorced from meaning making. Meaning still existed independent of, and prior to, the reader.

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[40] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

[41] For a useful summary see chapter five of Stephen Bonnycastle's *In Search of Authority: An Introductory Guide to Literary Theory* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1991).

[42] Most prominent of the New Critics were F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932/1950); and I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1929).

[43] First described by W. Wimsatt and M. Beardsley,"The Intentional Fallacy, The Affective Fallacy," In *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1958), 1015-1022.

[44] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1916/1974).

Generally speaking, the post-structural theorists[46] accepted Sausurrean linguistics, with one important caveat: that the meaning occurring within the relationship between signified and signifier be understood not only in terms of its *difference* from other structures, but also in terms of the way in which meaning is continually *deferred.* As mentioned in previous chapters, Derrida has been the most influential post-structuralist, and, with his coining of the word *différance,* has shown that "meaning" is as much a matter of what is not said as what is said. One of the projects of post-structuralism, then, has been deconstructive readings of texts which do not attempt to locate truthful meanings in words or in forms, but rather in the way each of these by their very presence announce an absence.[47]

More closely related to the social sciences (especially psychology) than linguistics and semiotics, subjective criticism has privileged the reader rather than the text. According to theorists such as Norman Holland[48] and David Bleich,[49] meaning can only be located in the reader's psychological response to a literary text as these are socially and culturally situated in communities of interpretation. Because persons are seen to have individually constructed sets of experiences, and because reading depends upon perception as seen through the lens of that psychology, meaning can only be a product of the reader and can never be located in the text.

As discussed in chapter one, theorists such as Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser have promoted an understanding of reading the literary text which does not privilege author, historical circumstances of writing, reader or contextual circumstances of reading. By suggesting that reading evolves from the relational work (Iser's formulation) or the transaction (Rosenblatt's) between reader and text as situated in the particular circumstances of reading, they seem able to circumvent the objectivism of the new critics and structuralists, the nihilism of the post-structuralists, and the often-criticized relativism of the subjective theorists. For Iser and Rosenblatt, meaning is not something in the text or the reader, but rather in the evocation of meaning as generated by the interpretive (we could say "hermeneutic") work of the reader.

By using the word "transaction," Rosenblatt[50] initiated an important conceptual shift to an understanding of meaning as emerging from the interaction of reader and text. Although Iser's theories have generally been aligned with Rosenblatt's, unlike her theory, even his earliest theorizing has never really considered the meaning as something which existed *between* the reader and the text (as in a transactional meaning) but instead as something inextricable from the lived experience of reading. In *The Act of Reading* he explains that the reason that we often feel that we are living another life while we read has to do with the fact that we are continually in the process of responding to our own reactions to the text so that after a time it is unclear whether it is the text or previous responses to the text which have the most influence on the kinds of meanings that are evoked. He writes: [A]s we read, we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event."[51]

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[45] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[46] Particularly Jacques Derrida with his influential *Of Grammatology,* trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[47] For an excellent summary of deconstruction see Sharon Crowley's *A Teacher's Guide to Deconstruction* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989).

[48] As first described in his book *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), and later in *Five Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

[49] David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[50] First appearing in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*

[51] Iser, *The Act of Reading,* 128-129.

With this formulation, Iser hints at the idea of reading as embodied action, for although he does not explicitly say so, it becomes clear that meaning is no longer a "third thing," as is suggested by the conception of meaning as a product of the transaction between reader and text. Instead, meaning is something which is seen as inextricable from the intertwined relational activity between reader and text as situated within the reader's ever-evolving lived experience. However, even in his later works,[52] Iser still insists that the reader's imagination is conditioned by the literary text. It is this formulation which demonstrates clearly that his theory of reading is firmly embedded within a philosophical tradition that understands our task as human subjects to adapt to the varying conditions of a world that is "out there." Although Iser clearly acknowledges that readers help to create the conditions to which they must continually adapt, and suggests that this depends upon a history of understanding, he does not explicitly describe reading as the bringing forth of a world.

In order to understand reading as *embodied action* we must first remember that human beings, like all living entities, must retain ongoing structural coupling with an environment. Unlike other living species, however, humans organize their world and their interpersonal relations through the use of a language which has the potential to retrieve and narrate histories of individuals and groups of individuals. (At least we think we're the only ones who can do this!) Language, then, becomes an important symbolic system for the development of cognition during ongoing structural coupling. The most important point for this discussion of reading as enaction is that, as human subjects, we do not structurally couple with individuals or individual things one-by-one as they occur in an environment; rather, our environment is comprised of everything which is *not-us*. This means that coherent and meaningful action in the world depends upon ongoing structural coupling between *us/not-us*. It is most important to understand, however, that although it seems like there are *two* things (us and not-us), this is not really the case, for we are always already part of the *not-us* with which all the rest of the world relates. We are part of the environment. Our bodies exist in the integrity of the world's ecology.

Unskinning.

If we are to reconceptualize the reading of the literary text as enaction (embodied action) rather than as transaction, we must understand that although literary texts are identifiable as distinct entities, they do not exist independently from other entities in their environment. In other words, literary texts are always read *in relation to* everything else in the environment. During the act of reading, the literary text becomes read *with* a world that *includes* reading. We could say, that although we have culturally imposed distinctions between a text and things that are not a text, there is fundamentally no *fixed* boundary between the literary text and anything else in our environment, for the literary text always exists in the *not-us* world with which we maintain relations.

It is at this point that the departure from the weaving metaphor becomes necessary, for just as organisms *co-evolve* with their environments, literary readings *co-emerge* through the act of reading as it is situated in ongoing structural coupling with a world. This explains why *when* and *where* we read matters, for even if our reading is done privately (i.e., one reader, one text), the location of reading matters. If I am reading a new novel at home and I receive an unexpected call from an old friend, that telephone conversation exists *with* my reading of the book. It becomes part of the act of reading. Reading the *same novel* in another context (such as in a school classroom), then, means that the text exists within a different organizational structure of *not-us* and therefore must have an altered *identity* as a literary text. Of course, this runs against the grain of our commonsense beliefs about reading, since even if we believe that the *meaning* is always the product of interaction between author and text, we often forget that the actual *identity* of the text and the reader depends upon situational location.

Generally speaking, understanding reading as embodied action (enaction) simply means keeping in mind the image of unskinning. When applied to reading, unskinning asks us to understand that although there are physical differences between literary texts and other things in the world — and differences between various readers — neither readers nor literary texts can escape their prior histories of interaction in the world. Not only are these literally inscribed in the words that are used to comprise the literary text and in the flesh, bone, and system of intelligence that comprise the reader, but these histories are also inscribed in the ideological and material culture which supports reading. The meanings that are derived from reader-text interactions, however, must never be thought of as *optimizations* no matter how well-written the text might be or how earnest the reader might be. Instead, reading as embodied action must always be thought of as co-emergent *drift* where the infinite contingencies that are part the act of reading are continually in the process of evolving. Literary texts, then, always *co-exist* and *co-evolve* with and through readers, reading environments, and histories of interactions between these.

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[52] *Prospecting*, (1989); *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, (1993).

The very existence of literary texts that are read or literary texts which *have been read*, contribute to the environment in which readers and non-readers exist. Therefore, it is not true that non-readers are not influenced by literary readings. Like everything else that is part of our culture, literary texts are involved in the ecology of relations of which we are an inextricable part. Like mass media advertising, popular music, films, or television, literary texts must be understood as cultural icons which, in some way, influence our overall cultural lexicon and the way in which we *embody* that culture. Even if the text is *only* read by the author who composes it, the fact that her or his literary imagination is invoked ultimately changes the ecology of world relations.

It could be said, then, that literary texts co-emerge with a world whether they are continually read or not. Long after my initial reading of *The English Patient* I continued to re-think the text in relation to new circumstances. This is not an unusual phenomenon. Many readers who engage imaginatively with a text continue that imaginative process long after the reading has been complete. In fact, the conversations our reading group had about *The English Patient* suggested that a much deeper reading occurred weeks following the actual reading of the text. It was only when we had lived with the *memory* of the reading for a time that some of us were able to more usefully integrate our imaginative engagement into interpretations of our present lives. This is an important point, for it helps us to understand that the *endpoint* of reading can never really be defined, for once the act of imaginative literary engagement becomes part of our history of structural coupling it is forever inscribed in the collective experience we bring to new situations. Literary engagement, then, becomes part of the infinite circle of understanding that co-emerges with our world. It becomes, one could say, part of a world consciousness. Again, this evokes the unskinning image, for even though the entities that comprise this global consciousness are distinct, in the end, we are finally unable to extricate one from the other.

It might also be said that a literary text that *I* have read exists differently in the world simply because I have read it. Although this sounds like a commonsense idea, it is not really, for most of us do not actually believe that one reader reading can change the status of a literary text. And perhaps, in the conventional understanding of change, this might be true. However, if we believe that readings become part of the world, then we must agree that even *one* reader completing *one* reading of *one* literary text will, in some way have her or his phenomenal world affected by that imaginative encounter. And if one person's world is affected, then, of course, her or his relations with others in the world will be affected. Even though millions of persons have purchased and read copies of *The English Patient*, my reading of it has altered, in some way, how it will come to exist relationally with and through the world. My reading, and every other person's reading of *The English Patient*, in some way is integrated into the world, and therefore begins to co-emerge with that world.

Unskinning.

This last point demonstrates the way in which the meanings evoked from literary engagements become part of the ongoing evolution of knowledge that exists among us/not-us. This means that literary meanings must not be thought of as *third things* that emerge from *transactions* between readers and texts, but instead as a material part of the self as it is inextricably bound to a relational world. From this, we can say that the body literally carries meaning in it in the phenomenological and biological sense. Although Ondaatje speaks of this figuratively when describing Hana's reading:

> She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams.[53]

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[53] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 12.

I mean this in a more literal sense, where literary meanings literally become part of our physiological encounter with the world and eventually influence and shape us biologically.

Unskinning.

Thinking of imaginative literary engagements as embodied action means understanding that the reader's lived, experiential world is actually bigger because of reading. (In much the same way in which the English patient's copy of *Herodotus* is fatter than it was before it became part of his life.) It also means that one's sense of self, one's understanding of the world, one's very existence, is as much caught up in the *forms* we call literary as in our own bodies. Just as the literary text begins to bodily live within our own experience of the world, we begin to live in the very body of the text. This means, of course, that if we are seeking some *truth* of physical existence and literary textual practice, we will seek in vain. For, in the end, there is no *fixed truth* in the literary text, in the reader, or in any meaning which occurs through reading. Truth simply becomes understood as whatever allows successful structural coupling between a human subject and a world which allows an imaginative reading to continue. A truthful reading of a literary text, therefore, is one which does not compromise the evolving relationship among readers and texts in the unity of *us/not-us*. If confusion, misunderstanding, and irreconcilable differences in understanding occur causing a rupture in *us/not-us*, then truth is absent. In the end, the relations among *us/not-us* that includes the imaginative engagement with a literary text must, like any form of structural coupling, be thought of as an ever-evolving, unstable truth.

Unskinning.

Therefore, the unity of *us/not-us* — that includes reading which invokes the literary imagination — is always in a state of flux. It is a process of constant fixing and unfixing of understanding. It is a path laid down while walking. Interpretation is never merely a scrutiny of any one relational component of the act of reading; rather, it is an examination of the complexity of ongoing relationality among *us/not-us*. Hermeneutic interpretation, however, is required if we are to enrich our engagements with the not-us that includes the invoked literary imagination.

In the following chapter I will discuss the importance of responsibility in our hermeneutic interpretations. This discussion will function to announce the importance of ongoing critical interpretations of our lived relations that include literary readings. Following this, I will present various hermeneutic interpretations of our reading group's relations with each other and our reading of *The English Patient*. Through these hermeneutic interpretations, I will demonstrate the way in which understanding and interpreting reading as enaction (embodied action) can deepen our knowledge of the way the literary imagination functions in our ongoing relations in the world of significance that we bring forth with others.

Chapter Five

BRINGING FORTH A WORLD OF UNDERSTANDING

> Hermeneutics ... is for the hardy. It is a radical thinking which is suspicious of the easy way out.
>
> John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*[1]

> Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it.
>
> David Smith, *The Hermeneutic Imagination*[2]

> The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable.
>
> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*[3]

> This was a time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became half her world.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

In chapter two, the importance of the conditioned imagination was discussed in relation to reading the literary text. This "literary imagination," it was suggested, as something invoked and conditioned by the culturally announced forms of the literary text, asks that readers "write" while they read. Chapter three provided various explanations for the quality of relationship formed through the conditioned imagination, suggesting that the activity of imagining, among other things, enables the transgression of the symbolic to what Kristeva calls the semiotic chora. In order for the relationship to be strong and deep the reader needs, in Gadamer's view, to "play well" within the reader-text relation. The transgression from the symbolic to the semiotic chora, then, asks that the reader act *responsibly* — that she or he be *willing* and *able* to respond to the imaginative possibilities announced by the literary text through a diligent and dedicated *playing*. Responsibility for a deep relationship between reader and text, then, needs to be *shared* between author and reader. The author needs to present a text which invites readers into a set of conventions which condition the imagination; the reader needs to devote her- or himself to a dedicated reading. In chapter four, these relations were re-described as *embodied action,* whereby the boundaries between reader, text and world were said to fade as they co-evolve together during the act of reading and reflecting on that reading. These formulations suggest that the reader must not merely *engage* with the text, but instead, must engage *responsibly*. When reading is considered embodied action, the reader is understood as *co-labouring* with the historically effected and specified text in order to enable the creation of imaginatively conditioned *interpretations.*

In sum, I have attempted to show how our understanding of things like the character of the literary text, our unique relationships with these texts, our sense of self identity, and our way of bringing forth a world of understanding are all hermeneutic. They are so because each of these requires interpretation. In this chapter, I would like to elaborate on some of these ideas through an excavation of the practice of shared reading as informed by our reading group's discussions of *The English Patient.* Drawing primarily upon David Smith's[5] concept of "the hermeneutic imagination," this discussion is generally oriented around the question: What can we learn about our embodied situation in a world through hermeneutic reflections on shared readings of and responses to literary texts?

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[1] John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

[2] Smith, "Hermeneutic Inquiry: The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," 201.

[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 13.

[4] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 7.

[5] David Smith, *The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text,* 1991.

Hermeneutics and Responsibility

In his introduction to his essay on the subject of the hermeneutics as a form of educational inquiry, David Smith suggests that

> The aim of interpretation, it could be said, is not just another interpretation, but human freedom, which finds its light, identity, and dignity in those few brief moments when one's burdens can be shown to have their source in too limited a view of things.[6]

Understood in this way, interpretation is not something that can be *owned* or *given*, but instead is something that becomes part of the ecology of our ever-evolving subject/world relations. As a form of interpretive inquiry, the contemporary project of hermeneutics can be described as the ongoing need to be *responsible* for what we *know*, what we *do*, and who we *are*, always understood in relation to our historically and temporally effected situations within a world in which all action matters. Hermeneutic responsibility is not about telling the truth; it is not about reporting the way things *really* are (or were). Instead, hermeneutic responsibility entails a *meditation* on— a re-collection of — some of the contingencies of life that, in Gregory Bateson's words have resulted in "differences that make a difference."[7]

As Heidegger and Gadamer have explained, historical consciousness can only be present to us in terms of our futurity. We can only make decisions about who we are and who we might become in light of what Gadamer has called our "pre-judgments" — our prejudices. Here "prejudices" is not meant in any negative sense, but simply refers to the fact that understanding depends upon having already understood. We are forever implicated in the circularity of experience and understanding. Coming to understanding is not a truth-telling phenomenon. It is not, as a metaphysics of presence would have us believe, the ability to abstract our understanding from the world in order to say what the world is *really* like. Nor is understanding any sort of *reproductive* activity, for as Madison suggests, "To understand an experience, to reconstruct the past, is not to 'represent' it to ourselves; it is to *transform* it."[8] Just as Freire has suggested that reading the word is a reading of the world,[9] hermeneutic scholars have reminded us that these readings are always and forever *interpretations*. In reading the word (literally and figuratively) we simultaneously *write* or *bring forth* a world of significance.

David Jardine suggests that the most important task of hermeneutics is to bring to light the "presuppositions" of our lived experience that are buried in normativity, in habit. He suggests that "the task of hermeneutics is to recollect the contours and textures of the life we are already living, a life that is not secured by the methods we can wield to render such a life our object."[10] As Gadamer demonstrated in *Truth and Method*,[11] neither truth nor method can be determined by or located in the other; truth and method are forever implicated in the dialectical relations between them. Furthermore, these are always understood as co-emerging with the contingencies of lived experience.

Heidegger was among the first to explain how notions of what is "true" are always historically effected. Truth is always caught up in forms of language used for the expression or narration of experience. For Heidegger, truth was not something which was revealed, but rather "un-concealed" (from the Greek *aletheia*). Truth as un-concealment does not emerge directly through the human subject, but through the language that is spoken.[12] Following Heidegger, Gadamer developed his philosophical hermeneutics around the maxim, "Being that can be understood is language."[13] For Gadamer, language is not a "third thing" which hangs — suspended — between persons and their world; rather, language is inextricable from these relations. Language and world are forever contained in an ever-evolving, mutually specifying, ecological existence.

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[6] Ibid., 189

[7] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 315.

[8] Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), 189.

[9] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

[10] David Jardine, "Reflections on Education, Hermeneutics, and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a Restoring of Life to its Original Difficulty," in *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*, ed. William Pinar and William Reynolds (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 116.

[11] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. In his introduction, Gadamer explains the fundamental circularity between the ideas of truth and method, insisting that neither truth nor method can pre-exist one another, but rather, must always co-arise together through the process of living through a world.

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 113-142.

Rorty writes that "The suggestion that truth ... is out there is a legacy of an age in which the world was seen as the creation of a being who had a language of his own."[14] Like proponents of a theory of cognition as embodied action, Rorty rejects any notion that the world "gives directions" for our understanding of it:

> As long as we think that there is some relation called "fitting the world" or "expressing the real nature of the self" which can be possessed or lacked by vocabularies-as-wholes, we shall continue the traditional philosophical search for a criterion to tell us which vocabularies have this desirable feature. But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found.[15]

Does language speak us or do we speak language? Contemporary hermeneutic scholars such as Smith[16] and Jardine[17] would not situate themselves at either end of this dichotomy, but, like enactivist evolutionary and cognitive theorists Maturana and Varela[18] and Varela, Thompson and Rosch[19] would suggest that truth is an ontological rather than epistemological concern. Our experience of living through a world requires the maintenance of ongoing structural coupling with a world, which does *not mean* optimal adaptation according to directions given by a world (as in the formulation language speaks us) or through the adapting of the world through directions given by us (we speak language). Instead, a *responsible* hermeneutics would ask us to understand that the ongoing maintenance of *us/not-us* requires an ongoing *conversation* with a world through which we and the world are *mutually specified.* We, the world, the language we use to mediate our relations with the world, *co-emerge* through the process of lived experience.

When we are confused; when we mis-understand; when we mis-interpret; when we are excluded, silenced or marginalized, we are experiencing a rupture — a breach in the flow of structural coupling — between ourselves and the world. A responsible hermeneutics attempts to excavate these sites of rupture in order to more clearly understand what is at work within them that has become *invisible* to present consciousness. In this sense, hermeneutics has more to do with *absence* than *presence,* for as Derrida has reminded us, anything which is present to our consciousness requires that something be deferred, that something be absent.[20]

It is the presence of this absence that often causes a sense of self-doubt, confusion and, at the same time, often propels the self into self-inquiry as the means to eliminate these confusions and doubts. The belief that the self is somehow "enclosed" inside the "mind" of an individual who is able to exist in a fully named, articulated world, has led to ongoing cultural and personal neurosis.

Charles Taylor[21] has described this phenomena as the result of three "malaises" of modernity: *individualism, instrumental reason,* and *loss of freedom.* The (primarily Western) belief that one is "in control" of one's own life — a life which can be "bettered" through a particular ethic of living — has, in Taylor's view, led to a type of "soft despotism" whereby individuals become so preoccupied with their own striving that they become politically inert, removed from the ongoing discourse of public life and decision-making. Similarly, Albert

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[13] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 432.

[14] Richard Rorty, 5.

[15] Ibid., 6-7.

[16] Smith, "The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text."

[17] Jardine, "Reflections on Education, Hermeneutics and Difficulty."

[18] Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge* (Boston: Shambala, 1987).

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience.*

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology.* See chapter three for a more detailed description of the Derrida's use of the word *différance.*

[21] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity,* (Concord, ON: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1991).

Borgmann[22] has suggested that much of the modern world has become a victim of what he terms *sullen indolence,* which he describes as "the incapacity to be pained by things undone and challenges unmet,"[23] and as "people's inability to find meaning in suffering, and the acceptance of resentment, resentment not of people but of inalienable pain."[24] Like Taylor, Borgmann believes that much of this sullenness and indolence can be traced to the frantic, hyperactive grasping for a fuller, more perfectly defined life — a grasping that has co-evolved with the modern quest for truth and certainty. In addition to making individuals feel "responsible" for their own situation, it has removed a sense of communal responsibility for the other.

The "enclosing" of self and self-responsibility within the individual has alienated and isolated individuals from each other and from the world with which they must maintain relations. Therefore, although there is an *illusion* of an autonomous and independent self which is self-knowing and self-interpreting, there is the *need* to maintain relations with the environment, which if we think back to an understanding of living as embodied action, includes *all* things in the environment. When the self is understood as imprisoned in the body, interpretation is understood as self-narration rather than as some deeper understanding of the way in which the self is continually mutually specified *with a world.* Hermeneutics seeks to reinstate the relationality of life itself, and generate an understanding of self as a linguistic construction which stands in the place of the evolving focal points of an understanding of our lived experience. In this view, the self is not comprised of some foundational core within each person which continually adapts to ongoing lived experience. Rather, the self exists within the narrative interpretations of our ongoing, historically effected (but not determined) relations in the world.

As Sartre[25] and Merleau-Ponty[26] have helped us to understand, we can only know about the self through our *perceived* and *interpreted* relations with others as contained in a world. This means that what we know and how we know it are inextricable from who we think we are in relation to each other and our inherited ways of having lived as a species. Hermeneutic responsibility means not only *acknowledging* these inextricable relations, it means continually *remembering* them in the midst of hermeneutic inquiries. First and foremost, this means understanding that inquiry has no definitive beginning or end points, for as a part of an ongoing conversation with the world, inquiry can only slip into what is always already there. Hermeneutic inquiry is not about *constructing* sites for objective inquiry, it is about existing in the midst of *already-there* sites in order to come to a deeper understanding of what the experience of being-there can present to us.

Understanding the way in which we are implicated in these hermeneutic inquiries, as suggested in previous chapters, depends upon knowledge about the way in which self identity co-emerges with our environment. In his book *Narrative and the Self,*[27] Anthony Kerby explains how our understanding of ourselves in relation to the world depends upon the ongoing writing and reading of identity. He describes a model of the human subject that takes narration as fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject. Following Heidegger, Gadamer, and Merleau-Ponty, Kerby suggests that the sense of self, as constituted through language, is the result of discursive praxis rather than something which has ontological or epistemological priority. For Kerby, self-narration is understood as an interpretive activity, not simply a mirroring of the past. As such, the *meaning* of any memories of the past which are re-presented through a language of narration are never *fixed* or *final,* but are continually re-written in light of present circumstances. The excavation of the past within the context of the present, because it is always an *interpretation* is always a selective and *imaginative* activity. In this sense, Kerby's formulations about the self are properly hermeneutic since they demonstrate the way in which our perception (gaze) is always historically effected (subject to pre-judgment), while, at the same time, continually influenced by present circumstances and interpretations. Furthermore, this ever-evolving gaze is not directed by an individual body or by a world (including others in the world), but instead by the discursive practices which circumscribe relations among these.[28]

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[22] Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[23] Ibid., 7.

[24] Ibid., 12.

[25] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness.*

[26] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception.*

[27] Kerby, *Narrative and the Self.*

[28] D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly have attempted to render visible the largely de-legitimized

The ability to respond to the world (response-ability), then, may be understood as the ability to become (and remain) structurally coupled with a world as mediated by a language that evolves through a subject-world dialectic. Language is not seen as something that exists between body and world, but rather as something "essentially material,"[29] — that is, an extension of the sphere of activity of the human body. Therefore, the sense of self, although not located "in" the body (mind), is, as Merleau-Ponty would suggest, "embodied" in the physiological and phenomenological circumstances of our lived experience. Although the sense of self is understood by Kerby as the product of creative narration — a fiction; it is a fiction which must enable the human subject to remain viable with her or his environment. When this idea is aligned with Varela et al.'s theory of cognition as embodied action and Gadamer's account of the historically effected nature of consciousness, it becomes clear that human existence is largely dependent on the ongoing interpretations of our ever-evolving situation. This suggests that hermeneutic inquiry must refrain from questions of insulation and isolation (What does this mean for me?) and strive instead for inquiry which demonstrates our response-ability to those with whom and that with which we co-exist. This does not mean that we should engage in a hermeneutics of exhortation (What did he mean by that? What can we say about her?) or truth (What does all this *really* mean?), but that we should instead aim for a hermeneutics of *difficulty* and *ambiguity* through what David Smith has called the *hermeneutic imagination.*[30]

Invoking the Hermeneutic Imagination

David Smith[31] suggests that most research in the field of education emerges from what he calls the "tradition of consciousness" or the "critical tradition." The tradition of consciousness insists that research in education involves getting the facts of a particular case right and conveying them accurately. Whether this is research founded upon the "scientific method" or more qualitative forms of inquiry such as ethnography or grounded theory, the aim of inquiry is understood as the reporting of the "truth" of what the world is really like. Although the critical traditions are more concerned with excavating what discourses of power contribute to various social evils and inequities, these share with the tradition of consciousness the idea that "the nature of reality can be decided in advance of a full experience of it."[32] Therefore, although these traditions are generally at odds with one another (one seeking to name and stabilize culture, the other seeking to repudiate that culture) they share the belief that it is possible to inquire into the world by standing outside of it. Inquiry becomes commentating.

Smith suggests that philosophical hermeneutics, when applied to research in the field of education, can be a way out of the unproductive binaries between traditions of consciousness and the critical traditions. For Smith, hermeneutic inquiry is not a commentary *on* or *about* something; it does not purport to proclaim any fixed truth, nor to assist others in the elimination of a false consciousness about the way things *really* are. Instead, hermeneutic inquiry, is guided by what he calls the "hermeneutic imagination." He writes:

> In educational terms, the hermeneutic imagination throws open the challenge to inquire into what we mean when we use words like curriculum, research, and pedagogy. We are challenged to ask what makes it possible for us to speak, think, and act in ways we do.[33]

The hermeneutic imagination seeks to illuminate the *conditions* which make particular interpretations possible, and furthermore to *imagine* what conditions might alter our interpretations. Understood as such, it becomes clear that hermeneutic inquiry is not merely an excavation of what makes things work (as in descriptive and expository accounts of the enactment of curriculum in a classroom or the reading of a literary text) or as an inquiry into the socio-political architecture of these events (as in feminist and other critical inquiries), but rather to engage in *creative* interpretations which, in themselves, hold the potential for the generation

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and often invisible work of teachers by developing methods of narrative inquiry. For a good overview see Michael F. Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988) and D. Jean Clandinin and Michael F. Connelly, "Teacher as Curriculum Maker," in *Handbook of Research on Curriculum,* ed. Philip W. Jackson (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 363-401.

[29] Kerby, *Narrative and the Self.*

[30] Smith, "The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text."

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 196.

[33] Ibid., 188.

of knowledge. This does not mean that various interpretive frameworks are ignored, but rather that these are understood as tools which can help to shape the hermeneutic imagination more creatively. Therefore, although Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, Freudian or Derridean analysis may be used, none is used exclusively. Hermeneutics avoids the isolation of a particular interpretive ideology. It is believed that interpretation should be a creative process emerging from a dedicated *mindfulness* of the matter of interest. As Smith suggests, "Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it."[34]

Like the literary imagination, the hermeneutic imagination does not exist apart from conditioning situations. Like any event of understanding, the hermeneutic imagination is always implicated in language, and as such, is continually conditioned by the kinds of language events with which it co-emerges. Just as the literary imagination depends on the reader's engagement with a particular literary text, the hermeneutic imagination depends upon the conditioning effects of some event-structure. Although the hermeneutic imagination may be invoked in a variety of ways, Gadamer helps us to understand that it is best conditioned through events which have the character of a conversation. He writes:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it — i.e., that it allows something to 'emerge' which henceforth exists.[35]

Here Gadamer does not mean to suggest that all conversations are hermeneutic or that all hermeneutic inquiry must consist of verbal conversations. Instead, conversation is meant to be understood in a more figurative way, where it serves to show the way in which hermeneutic interpretations must always emerge from the middle of things. Like a good conversation, in which the speakers forget themselves and attend instead to the topic of conversation, good hermeneutic inquiry emerges from situations in which a matter of interest is held in common (one could say, in a commonplace) among participants. Compatible with the idea of cognition as embodied action, hermeneutic inquiry shows how meaning *co-emerges* with meaning-making activities (such as reading) and furthermore, how these ever-evolving meanings represent a *world of significance* which has been brought forth by the inquirers.

Just as a good conversation does not generally proceed through pre-established questions or methods, neither does hermeneutic research. Instead, inquiry exists in the middle of some matter of interest. It is through the process of what Ted Aoki has called "dwelling in the middle"[36] that questions for inquiry will eventually present themselves, and, through that presentation, help the participants in the inquiry come to a deeper understanding of the subject which is held in the "commonplace" of inquiry. The hermeneutic imagination, then, is conditioned by the ever-evolving moment-to-moment contingencies of living through the "commonplaces" of inquiry which, because of the way in which participants must exist within them, resemble the act of conversation. What is "held" between those involved in the inquiry, like the subject of a conversation, will transform and evolve as the event of inquiry is played out. Crucial to the quality of this process of hermeneutic inquiry, according to Gadamer, is the imagination of the researcher:

> What [is it] that really makes the productive scholar? That he has learned the methods? The person who never produces anything new has also done that. It is imagination (*Phantasie*) that is

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[34] Ibid., 201.

[35] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 383.

[36] Ted Aoki, *Inspiriting Curriculum and Pedagogy: Talks to Teachers* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press), 7-10.

> the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves the sense for what is questionable.[37]

In some ways, the hermeneutic imagination of the researcher functions very much like the literary imagination for it too is conditioned by the "textual conditions" in which it is invoked. Additionally, like the literary imagination, the hermeneutic imagination will only be invoked if particular conditions are present or announced. Just as the literary text must be announced as such in order for readers to engage imaginatively with it, sites of hermeneutic inquiry must be announced as such in order to evoke the hermeneutic imagination. This is an important point, for it helps us to understand that even though all events hold the *potential* for interpretation through the hermeneutic imagination, because most events are not *announced* as such, they will remain uninterpreted. Furthermore, if the comparison to the literary text is extended further, it becomes evident that not all events hold the same potential for interpretation. Like literary texts which are overly predictable and comfortable — or as Barthes[38] would say, *readerly* — events which are like this eliminate the needed *play* required for the hermeneutic imagination to be invoked. Like Barthes' notion of the *writerly* text, which requires that readers engage in greater degrees of speculation and interpretation in order to maintain a meaningful relation with the literary text, the hermeneutic imagination is best invoked in events which are more *writerly*.

Like the writerly literary text which is more apt to actively involve the reader's imagination, the "text" of hermeneutic research does not strive for the comfort of pre-determined method, which as Gadamer[39] reminds us, can only foreclose on meaning. Instead, the hermeneutic researcher seeks sites for inquiry that, like a conversation, allow the images and questions which will lead to deeper understanding to emerge from a dedicated attention to (mindfulness of) some mutually held interest. These sites, like Hana, Caravaggio, Kip and the English patient's readings and discussions of "Herodotus" become "commonplace" events. Because successful engagement within these sites cannot be founded upon pre-determined methods or fixed research structures, they are much more unpredictable and ambiguous than most research sites and, as a consequence require that inquirers move from an approach to research as "telling" to one of "listening."[40] Just as readers of writerly literary texts, must be attentive to sudden shifts and breaches in the text, so too must the researcher who places her/himself within the structures of the writerly research text.

In sum, educational research which supports the hermeneutic imagination may be characterized in four points. First, it seeks to locate sites for inquiry that situate interpreters in the middle of the activities related to some topic of mutual interest. Second, it seeks to situate all participants in activities which allow the path of inquiry to be "laid while walking." In hermeneutic inquiry method depends upon interpretations given to questions which "present themselves" rather than questions which are pre-determined. Third, hermeneutic inquiry does not seek comfortable situations or solutions, but rather seeks the rupture — the breach — in order to illuminate what is silenced and deferred in the ordinary course of daily events. Finally, hermeneutic inquiry must never devolve into reports of what was done, discovered, or concluded, but must instead show the ongoing and co-evolving relationship between *doing*, *knowing* and *being*.

For the balance of this chapter, I will present a series of six "hermeneutic windows" which, I believe, perform the announced character of the hermeneutic imagination as it pertains to an inquiry into the school curriculum and the literary imagination. The term "hermeneutic window" is used as an image to suggest the way in which hermeneutic inquiry can give us access to horizons of understanding that were not previously there. Hermeneutic inquiry can help us to see what we had not been previously able or willing to see. As such, hermeneutics can become a window into new understanding.

As a prelude to chapter six, which discusses shared literary readings in relation to teacher identity and pedagogy, the following interpretations will present this interest as it emerged from five teachers'[41] reading and shared responses to *The English Patient.*

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[37] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 12.

[38] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* .

[39] As explained in the introduction to *Truth and Method.*

[40] In *Listening to Reason: An Inquiry into Mathematics Teaching* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta, 1994), Brent A. Davis discusses the need for teaching and research into teaching to move away from metaphors of "telling" to those of "listening."

Out of Bounds

> I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[42]

> Teaching was beginning to overwhelm me. I had forgotten why I was doing it, and who I was while doing it. I needed a place to re-group — to think again about why I was teaching English.
>
> Ruth

As we shared responses to our readings of *The English Patient,* we were struck by the frequent references to boundaries and their transgression. The villa was at once a convent, a barracks, and a hospital. The history of its shifting functions were recorded in its structure. Wrapped up in Hana's identity was child, nurse, friend, lover, daughter; Caravaggio announced himself thief, spy, soldier. The English patient was not English; the British soldier Kip was not British; *The Histories* was at once a history and a fiction. And as we read and discussed this novel, we came to realize that we too were crossing boundaries, re-defining borders, *wondering* while we were *wandering* about the complexity of our involvement with each other as these co-emerged with our shared readings of this novel.

Because our group emerged from an open invitation from me to form a study group, we ended up more or less "thrown" together, not really knowing one another. At the beginning there were five teachers from one high school. The other two members (including myself) were former junior high school teachers who, at the time, were graduate students from the same department at the local university. None of us found our initial meetings very comfortable.[43] Later conversations with individuals in the group, plus reflections of my own feelings of discomfort in the initial stages of our process, helped me to understand that many of the feelings of discomfort had to do with feeling "out of bounds." Because I, unlike most university researchers, had not "prescribed" the activities of the group or asked that the group "identify a problem" that we could address in our meetings, we had to attempt to deal simultaneously with the uncertainty of not knowing each other, and of not knowing precisely why we were gathered together. Even though we had quickly agreed that we were all interested in reading and discussing literature, our *purposes* for doing this were not immediately clear. One could say that the hermeneutic question had not yet presented itself. We felt at loose ends, displaced: out of bounds.

What does it mean to be out of bounds? In a sport like football out of bounds means being outside of the playing area, in a place where the game cannot go on. It is really a "no-place" (Greek *u-topos*, "utopia"). In order for a particular demarcation of "space" to be considered a "place" there needs to be some potentially meaningful activity assigned to that place. In football, the place — the playing field — designates a space in which particular rules will be invoked in order for the "game" to be played. In the school classroom, particular rules about "how one plays" are understood, in advance, and from this emerges some sense of the classroom as a "place." The movement from demarcated space to place requires the delineation of a set of rules which help to define the way in which interactions will occur within a particular space. When the rules and roles are defined in the absence of a space, playing cannot occur. Alternatively, when the space is defined in the absence of a sense of rules and roles, playing the game becomes a different kind of play — a back and forth exploration of the space in relation to the constituents and components of the space. Here playing is understood as improvisational activity which has as its goal the ongoing mutual specification of space and game.

In order for understanding of one's situation to occur, there usually needs to be an understanding of one's position and purpose in a space. Feeling "displaced" is a problem that needs to be solved in order for one to overcome feelings of being out-of-bounds. Such was the case for all of the characters in *The English Patient.* All, in one way or another, were living in spaces that were not yet places and, at the same time, were attempting to come to an understanding of their situation with others in these spaces. Kip, for example, was thrust into the middle of a war-torn space which required that he somehow translate his past experiences and life into a set of skills which would allow space to become place. Translating historically effected perceptual abilities and mechanical skills into those required for bomb-disposal helped to re-configure the boundaries of his own sense of self in relation to the newly inhabited space. The English patient, we learn, has spent the greater part of his lifetime negotiating ever-shifting spaces, so much so, that his own sense of self seems to be in question. It is only by deliberate re-readings and interpretations of his commonplace book through conversations with others at the villa does he finally seem to be able to locate himself historically, temporally and spatially. For Kip, Hana, Caravaggio, and the English patient, the villa is not at first a place, but instead a space which for them is no-place (utopia) — an opening, a breach, a rupture in history/geography where no-longer-useful boundaries could be erased, dismantled, re-drawn. This no-place permitted them to remain out-of-the-bounds of their own lives. Eventually, it became a hermeneutic place.

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[41] Five if I include my own readings and responses.

[42] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 139.

[43] I later learned that this was one of the reasons two members dropped out.

Although our reading group met in a particular space (in one of the classrooms in the high school) which usually functioned as a specifically purposeful place (i.e., learning place for students), it was not immediately clear to us how we were to configure ourselves in relation to each other within this space. The classroom place had now become just another space — an opening in the middle of things. Our usually well-defined and "bounded" selves (teachers, university students, researchers) were called into question. Who were we in this space if we could not be teachers? Who were we if we could not be university researchers armed with a program, an agenda? We were missing the map.

Like desert explorers we felt the anxiety of feeling unable to map the ever-shifting dunes; we sought landmarks, conventions, habits to which we could orient, locate, and re-draw the boundaries of ourselves in relation to each other. Like explorations in the desert, however, mapping the terrain of our explorations into reading and teaching could not (did not) emerge from a pre-determined plan, but *co-emerged* with the path which was laid as we read together. Like the inhabitants of the villa in *The English Patient*, we felt the loss of previously defined boundaries of who we were. Interestingly, for most of us, this loss quickly became transformed into the excitement of what "playing" together in this not-yet-place would yield.

It is important to understand that upon convening the reading group I had a particular research *interest*. I was interested in what it was like for teachers to move from the experience of reading literature to the experience of teaching it. This interest, however, did not drive the group, since the teachers were primarily interested in reflecting upon their own reading and their current teaching practices in order to work collectively to plan new units of study. Clearly, these varying interests had points of intersection; each seemed to require that we spend some time reading and discussing our reading processes and responses in the light of our roles as English teachers. At the same time, all of us entered the "space" with historically effected "selves" which were, of course, the launching pad for some of these pre-determined ideas. Although we "played around" with these ideas in our first meeting together, we seemed to quickly agree that a useful starting point for any discussions would be shared responses to selected pieces of literature. This led to an initial list of short stories which we read and discussed together, followed by a series of novels beginning with *The English Patient*.

In retrospect, it seems perfectly logical and natural for English teachers to inquire into their own practices by reading literature, and it could be said that this was our intention. However, it could also be said that because we felt "out-of-bounds," we felt the need for some activity which could become a "commonplace" for reflection upon our situation in relation to each other in this boundless space. Rather than attempt to negotiate which questions should be taken up, we seemed to understand that the real questions — the hermeneutic questions — would only present themselves in the midst of some activity which required a responsible dedication of oneself to some shared task. Although our initial drifting about in the first couple of meetings left us feeling uncomfortable with the ambiguity of this no-place, it was precisely the dwelling within this difficult, boundless, ambiguous place that helped us to understand that our processes (methods) must evolve with our living together in this space. And like the inhabitants of the villa in *The English Patient*, we found that this nomadic existence was bearable when a commonplace — in the form of various literary texts — could help us to focus our activity. Like the English patient's copy of Herodotus's *The Histories*, which became a commonplace for the ongoing writing and re-writing of his self at it co-emerged with his historically effected interactions in a world, our shared responses to literary texts became a commonplace for inquiry which went well beyond interpretations of our own reading processes and teaching practices.

Because reading, like all action in the world, is embodied, the reading that we shared became a commonplace for inquiry into ourselves as structurally coupled to a world that contained the text in question, others in our reading group, and our respective historically effected perceptions. This does not mean that any one component of this commonplace *determined* any other, but rather that all of them, simultaneously, participated in co-specifying activity. What we might call the boundaries between us (as teachers, researchers, readers, writers, married, unmarried, straight, gay, male, female) were re-written within the culturally announced "space" of the literary text as it became situated in the no-place of our research.

As we shared our nomadic wanderings/wonderings through the literary texts with one another, we became aware that it was not really possible to discern the "effects" of any one condition or component on any of the others. However, because we were conducting our explorations in largely uncharted spaces we became aware of the way in which the contingencies of our experience together, through a process of natural drift (bricolage), revealed to each of us a path of inquiry which eventually led to a deeper understanding of our lived situations.

Unskinning Private and Public Readings

> When I was growing up and going to school, reading really was a private thing. We wrote essays about what we read, but we never did any personal response. I guess I'm still not used to it.
>
> Mena

> But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense but to look for the truth in others.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[44]

Discussion about the difference between reading literary texts for personal pleasure and reading them for school became common during our reading of *The English Patient.* In fact, we came to understand that because our reading of *The English Patient* was meant to be discussed *publicly* we were unable to have a *private* encounter with it. At the same time, we wondered if it was really possible to *ever* have a private encounter with a text. The question, then, of what constituted a private reading and a public reading presented itself.

What can we say about the boundary between something which is considered *private* and something *public?* Does doing something like reading "in private" simply mean doing it alone? Or does private mean "keeping it to oneself?" Does public mean reading with others? Among others? For a common purpose? Is private the same as *personal?* Is public the same as *communal?*

In his review and analysis of the modern era, Albert Borgmann[45] traces the historical roots of contemporary distinctions between the private and the public. These distinctions, he suggests, are relatively recent, emerging principally from the Enlightenment as announced by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis,*[46] René Descartes *Discourse on Method*[47] and John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government.*[48] Although all three are implicated in the modern quest for reason, method, and absolute truth, Borgmann singles out Locke's *Treatise* as primarily responsible for the modern idea of individualism which, he suggests, led to distinctions between the private and the public. He writes:

> Locke's *Treatise* is a celebration of the individual, the unencumbered and autonomous human being. Nature and reason are little more than indistinct backdrops for the individual. The autonomy of the single self is the new authority of last appeal. The common order arises from individuals through an agreement, and this contract remains subservient to the individual.[49]

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[44] Ibid., 117.

[45] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide.*

[46] Francis Bacon, *The Great Instaurition and New Atlantis,* ed. J. Weinberger (Arlington Heights, Ill: Harlan Davidson, 1980).

[47] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1956).

[48] John Locke, *Treatise of Civil Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration,* ed. Charles L. Sherman (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965).

[49] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide,* 25.

Modern individualism has contributed to the belief that the human subject can (should) be the author of her or his own life (destiny). That one is not able to accomplish this in the absence of others has been acknowledged, and hence the need to engage in activities which are collective has been understood. However, it is this belief in the importance of the individual's rights and freedoms that has contributed to a move away from the largely integrated lives of families and communities in the pre-modern age, and to the severing of what has become known as the "private" experience from the "public" experience.

As the industrial and scientific revolutions gained momentum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there evolved an increased distinction between producers and consumers of goods and a concurrent move towards specialization of both goods and services. As well, monuments such as department stores, libraries and opera houses, which supported this free-market ethos, became public places where individuals gathered. As opposed to pre-modern gatherings where goods were collectively produced, where music was commonly created, and where reading and storytelling were collaborative activities, modern public places transformed persons from participants to "consumers of commodities produced for them by experts."[50]

Borgmann suggests that unlike pre-modern public gatherings which facilitated occasions of public celebration, these newly defined public places served largely instrumental functions. This led to a fundamental distinction between two kinds of public and private experience: the *social* and the *economic*. Whereas these were indistinguishable in pre-modern eras where the lines between work and recreation were less neatly drawn and the rights of the individual were generally subordinate to collective interests, modernity has produced a distinction between one's *private life* and life in the *private sector*. The former is generally aligned with an idea of private as something personal — something which one owns and is responsible for. The latter, within a free-market economy at least, exists as free enterprise, and is supported by what Borgmann calls "rugged individuals"[51] who, through their own efforts, are said to concomitantly achieve personal success and contribute economically to the community as a whole. Unlike the social public-private distinction, the economic one does not understand private as something personal and undisclosed. It is, rather something which is privately owned, but which necessarily exists in full-view of the general public.

Of course, these two understandings of private are often conflated. Public events of leisure may be privately experienced within the private sector. A cinema, for example, may be owned by an individual. Movie-goers participate in a public spectacle (watching a movie), but are expected to have a private (personal) response to that event. Although accomplished in full-view of others (in public), this response is expected to remain private during the activity of watching the movie. It is unacceptable, for example (in Western cultures, at least), for an audience member in a movie theatre to make public announcements of her or his response. Although persons sometimes *show* their response through laughter, applause, cheers and/or tears, there is no opportunity for public disclosures of how these feelings were arrived at by the individual. The response to the film is considered *private*. It is thought to be *owned* by the individual and, although publicly constituted, it is not expected to be shared.

The ambiguity surrounding socially and economically driven understandings of the private and the public become evident in our treatment of the literary text. Although always existing within the historically effected norms and values of a culture, the author, as protected by laws of copyright, is considered the "owner" of the text. Even though the author and the text emerge from a particular public context, and the text is meant to be read by the public, both the writing and the reading of the text are considered largely private activities. Even if we reject Hirsch's[52] insistence that the intention of the author must be known to the reader in order for a correct interpretation to be rendered — subscribing instead to the idea that the reader is entitled to her or his own response[53] — there is no doubt that the author is still authoritative. As consumers of the literary text, we want evidence of the producer. Therefore, although the authoring of a literary text is considered a private process (between author and text) and reading equally so (between individual reader and text), both processes are fixed within particular transactions driven by a free-market economy in which various elements of the private sector (publishers, retail stores) as well as the public sector (teachers, the academic community) compete for public access to consumers (readers).

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[50] Ibid., 41.

[51] Ibid., 45.

[52] E.D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[53] As promoted by literary theorists David Bleich in *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), Stanley Fish in *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), and Norman Holland in *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

However, even though the exchange of literary texts functions within a publicly constituted, commodified culture of reading, the actual reading of these texts, like the viewing of movies, whether these are accomplished alone or in public, are meant to be private experiences. As belonging to the individual, these private readings become *personal* (i.e., part of the person) which, unlike other reading activities done in public (menus, business correspondence, contracts, invoices), is something that is generally not publicly shared. Because modern readers of literary texts have become accustomed to understanding the reading of literary texts as something private, the experience of reading the text has largely become a commonplace for *self*-interpretation rather than a commonplace for public discourse. And since the self, in the modern age, is considered contained within the individual, the reading of literary texts becomes another *self-centered* activity for which the individual reader is primarily responsible.

Socially speaking, the reading of the literary text is something which is done in the absence of interaction with others (it is socially passive); economically, the reading of the text is a form of consumption where, because the reader is thought to own the text, she is believed to be able to "produce" a response which is wholly her own and which she is entitled to either keep to herself or, under certain circumstances, share with others. A private reading, then, is something which is personal (enacted for one's own benefit) rather than communal (enacted for a common good).

What happens, then, when this private (personal) reading and response is located in a public (communal) setting? As apparent from the quotes from Anna, Ingrid and Mena which appeared earlier in this section, the experience of reading for public purposes is somewhat different when reading for oneself. Even though each of us performed our readings of *The English Patient* privately (we read silently to ourselves), the experience was one of reading publicly. The readings which we usually kept personal — those which we wholly *owned* as part of our individual experience of the world — were suddenly being enacted in the presence of a *projected* public. Knowing that we would be expected to verbalize our experience of reading profoundly changed that experience for each of us. Although we understood that we were participants in what Bleich[54] and Fish[55] have called "interpretive communities," which affected our meaning-making activities in reading, fore-knowledge about the need to disclose these meanings in a public forum (our reading group) transformed the private experience of solitary reading into a more public one.

This is particularly significant for in our culture what is private is closely aligned with what is *secret*. Keeping something private is akin to keeping a secret. We do not want our secrets (private things) made public. Although many things which are private are solitary (like some thoughts, feelings, diaries), others (such as love letters, conversations) are meant to be shared. What is private and secret, then, depends on particular circumstances and conditions, not upon whether these are solitary or shared. A private thought (fantasy) can be had in a public place, a secret can be kept in a public place, a response to a literary text can be kept private (secret), or the "secret" can be told. If the response (secret) is told "in confidence" (to a confidante), it often retains its status as a "secret." Public announcements, however, transform what was secret to what is now disclosed. Through disclosure, a secret, becomes a material extension of the self.

The move from private to public in reading, then, may be seen as the disclosure that is required in the move from the *personal* to the *communal*. Of significance here is the idea that the self is in no way extricable from ongoing structural coupling with a world. Therefore, although a solitary engagement with a literary text *seems* private, because only the reader can know what he or she is thinking, the activity is always situated in an interpretive community that arises from everything that is not the reader. Therefore, even if the meaning evoked between private reader and text is *never disclosed* (i.e. remains secret), because it becomes an inextricable part of the reader's sense of self — which is inextricable from the public world — the "secret meaning" does, in fact, become part of the world. However, this private meaning, because it has been silenced, does not become part of the economy of knowledge; it remains excluded from participation in the private sector. It is only when private meaning is disclosed publicly that it functions as a material extension of the self, one that is able to become concretely used in the continual generation of knowledge.

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[54] Bleich, *Subjective Criticism.*

[55] Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*

Although the silencing of private responses alters life in the public sphere — since what is *not present* is as vital as what is present in the shaping of culture — it more clearly and obviously alters public events which have been designated communal. As opposed to "making something public," which generally means "making it available for community use," making something communal implies participation in a more explicit and deliberate *contract* among individuals. Not sharing my personal feelings about exercise to members of my health club is not the same as withholding my personal response to literary texts from my reading group. Although both are public, the latter has been constituted on the understanding that disclosed responses to literary text comprise the function of the group. Furthermore, the reading group does not merely have an instrumental function. Unlike my experience of exercise at the health club — which, although public, does not *depend* upon others — my experience in the reading group is a public event which is formulated around human relationships. As a member of the group — of the commune(ity) — I have a responsibility to fulfill the contractual obligations of membership, the most important of which is disclosure of my interpretations of literary texts which have arisen from personal engagements with them. Because I can, in no way, extricate my involvement with this text from my entire history of experiences, my actual response always includes *all* of those experiences, including those which I would prefer to not disclose publicly to the community of readers of which I am a member.

Because we feel that we "own" our personal response to a text, and are free to either keep it secret or disclose it in a public or communal setting, it begins to function as a "third thing" between us and the world. Although this "third thing" is illusory, in that it is inextricable from our relations in the world, our belief in its existence makes possible activities like public disclosures of a response to a text in the absence of public disclosures of aspects of our historically effected selves which contributed to that response. It was possible, for example, for me to understand the tumultuous relationship between the English patient and his lover Katharine because of my own experience in this sort of entanglement. However, because I did not care to reveal this private (secret) aspect of my life, I excluded the contribution it made to the interpretation of my reading to the reading group. Therefore, the personal response that I shared in our community was actually not the *response* which I had, but rather was an *interpretation* of a response that was re-constructed. Essentially, the reported response was imaginary.

It seems, then, that the boundaries between what we consider private and public in our experience of reading the literary text cannot be neatly drawn. The different experiences of reading personally and reading publicly became not only an issue for our reading group, but certainly remains an issue for the uses of literary texts in school classrooms. As teachers who were responding to our reading of literature in the public place of the reading group we wondered if it was significant that our reading experiences were altered by the knowledge of the need for public disclosure. Further, we wondered how much disclosure was necessary. How were our discussions affected by a less-than-fully disclosed response to the text?

Commitment

> As I read and re-read the book, trying to lift stuff off the page, I sometimes became angry with myself. I should have said, "Not knowing everything doesn't matter!" But I couldn't do that. I felt responsible for knowing.
>
> Anna

> He had suddenly a map of responsibility, something, he realized, that Lord Suffolk carried within his character at all times.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* [56]

In the field of education the word *community* has become increasingly popular as a slogan for describing classroom and research structures. Reading and writing instruction, for example, are considered more effective and socially rewarding if accomplished in communities of readers and writers.[57] Concurrent with this interest in the area of language arts instruction has been the promotion of collaborative research structures which are thought to foster this sense of community. Action research, for example, has sought to engage university researchers and classroom teachers in communities of inquirers who collaborate in projects which result in both personal and communal benefit.[58] It is believed that persons who typically serve as "subjects" of research (i.e. teachers, students) are more likely to derive personal and practical benefits from research in which they are meaningfully involved. This involvement is often discussed in terms of "communities" of researchers.

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[56] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 195.

Despite this popularity, the meaning of the word "community" is seldom questioned. What do we mean when we use the term community? As used in educational literature, the word community seems to invoke senses of comfortable, familiar, friendly groupings of persons who work together to accomplish collective tasks, in the process, achieving personal fulfillment. But is this what communities are like? Is this really what we *want* them to be like?

The Oxford English Dictionary[59] tells us that, like the word *communicate,* the word *community* originates in the Latin *communis* meaning "together; bound under obligation." *Communis* eventually became *comuna* which means "to talk together, converse; to hold intimate discourse." The words "community" and "communicate," then, present each other: to be in community requires communication; communication involves some sort of communal structure. Within these communal structures of communication, something is held in *common,* something is shared. In communication there is implied some form of working together, some sharing of work. This suggests that communication is a kind of *collaboration* which has its roots in the Latin *collabora-re,* meaning "to work in conjunction with another or other, to co-operate." Further etymological tracing reveals that *laborare* is derived from *laborem* meaning "exertions of the faculties of the body or mind especially when painful or compulsory."

Collaboration, then, must be understood as a form of *work* (labour) which is often painful and/or difficult. As collaborative structures, communities must not just be seen as places which simply facilitate communication, but rather as places where individuals are somehow *bound* together in the service of some *common* goal or good. Therefore, a community seeks to affirm what is held in common and to bind under obligation its members who come together to be of service to the community. As a form of co-labouring, these communal structures, then, must somehow value what is *communal* over what is *personal.*

As suggested in the previous section, that which is *communal* is not the same as that which is *public.* The move from public to communal entails a shift in purpose, for the latter suggests a *commitment* to some goal, some venture, some idea held in common. The Villa San Girolama in *The English Patient,* for example, was not a *public* place; it was not a museum. Rather, it was a *commonplace* — a *communal* place in which the four inhabitants needed to work together (co-labour). Because the villa served as a commonplace for Hana's committed relationship to the English patient, others who arrived later (Caravaggio and Kip) needed to also commit themselves to this endeavor. Living in the villa and having relationships with each other required that each, in some way, become responsible for the ongoing project of care into which they entered (or as Heidegger would say, were thrown).

Moving from a public space to a commonplace, then, entails a contract, an agreement, a bargain, that is held between those who inhabit that place. It is the bargain, and the ongoing fulfilling of the bargain, that secures the commonplace. What we might call a community (commonplace) really functions like Gadamer's formulation of a good conversation. There must be a dedication to what is held between members of that community. It is from being responsible for the maintenance of the commonplace that members develop a map of responsibility. This map of responsibility is not something which

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[57] As discussed by T. Cairney and S. Langbien in "Building Communities of Readers and Writers," *The Reading Teacher,* 8 (1989), 560-567; Constance Weaver in *Understanding Whole Language* (Toronto: Irwin, 1990); Nancie Atwell in *In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton Cook, 1987); and Donald Graves in *Writing: Children and Teachers at Work* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983).

[58] As depicted in the work of William Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1986), and John Elliott's *Action Research for Educational Change* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991).

[59] 1991 edition.

pre-determines experiences in the commonplace, but instead is inextricable from the complex map of ever-evolving *relationships* which comprise the commonplace.

In order to transform the *space* of the classroom that we used for our group inquiry into reading and teaching the literary text, we needed to identify something to which we could become committed, for we sensed that it was *commitment* that was required to move from the public to the communal. And, of course, because we wanted to engage in meaningful *communication* with one another, the communal was essential. Therefore, although we might have simply shared ideas for literature teaching (i.e., Here's what *I* do), we chose to read and discuss our responses to *commonly* read literary texts.

This is significant for two major reasons. First, it signaled a move from existing in a *public* space to a commonplace. If we think back to Borgmann's formulation of public spaces as supporting largely instrumental functions, we can see that this is an important shift from formulating our relations through *transactions* of meaning (reporting on meaning) to *enactions* (creating meaning). Second, it meant that we needed to commit ourselves not only to a dedication to the group, but to a dedicated reading of the texts which we held in common. As explained in previous chapters, the *commonplace* of reading is never in the reader or in the text, but rather in the *relationship* between these. When these reader-text relations become part of a *community*, the commitment is dual — between text and reader and, at the same time, among readers.

Understood as a form of *embodied action*, this formulation helps to clarify the way in which each reader does not merely engage with a text, but always engaged with a text as it is implicated in particular situations. When the commonplace of the reading relationships in our reading group is discussed, it is not meant to be a *third* thing held among participants of the group, but rather is inextricably fused into the ongoing structural coupling between each reader and each reading or each text as these evolve through our communal endeavor. Like the English patient's annotated copy of *The Histories*, our "personal" relationships with *The English Patient* existed not merely for our use, but became committed to the common labour of our reading group. Because it was through our shared responses that we hoped to gain understanding into our own reading and teaching practices, we each felt that it was necessary to dedicate ourselves, more than we usually would, to the texts we read.

Part of the discomfort that almost all of us expressed of our reading of *The English Patient* can be traced to the desire each of us had to fulfill the contract of our communal life in the reading group. Although it would be convenient to suggest that this discomfort was due to our fore-knowledge of reading for different purposes — or that it was due to the move from the "private" to the "public" — these are likely not very accurate explanations, for neither helps to illuminate the complexity of the reader-text relations as these co-emerged *with* our relations with one another. Suggesting that being part of the reading group *caused* different reading experiences or that reading particular literary texts *caused* variations in the relations among group members does not account for the fact that *all* of these relations (texts-readers-reading group) *co-specified* one another. Therefore, rather than attempting to pinpoint and delineate cause and effect relationships between these, it seems more productive to understand how the relations between readers and texts and readers and each other *co-emerged* within the commonplaces of our shared inquiry. Because the commonplaces are founded upon a dedicated, committed co-labouring, the sites at which co-labouring was questioned, difficult, or impossible help to hermeneutically illuminate what is at work at these sites.

Time for Difficulty

> I am having difficulty getting through this book. There are so many references to things that I don't know, it makes it hard to understand.
>
> Mena

> Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read Kipling slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* [60]

Much of our group's early discussions of *The English Patient* centered on the difficulty we had forming a relationship with the text. Although we began our reading with great enthusiasm and energy, several of us in the group found this waning as we continued to feel "like a stranger" to this book to which we wanted to become committed. One group member reported no discomfort with the text, two reported some discomfort about feeling like an "outsider" to a text that seemed to resist "entry," one became angry about not being able to "control" the text and almost abandoned her reading of it, and one became so overwhelmed with feelings of ambiguity that arose from the difficulty of forming a relationship with it that she was unable to complete her reading.

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[60] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 94.

The difficulty of engaging with this text became an ongoing interest for us in the group, especially as we persevered with our reading, since it seemed that it was the ability to live through the *ambiguity* of not knowing where we were heading with this text (what world this path of reading was bringing forth) that ultimately made this reading experience more evocative and more profound than most others we had had. In the end, all of us who had completed the text, and especially those who had re-read it, believed that we had learned (and were continuing to learn) a great deal about ourselves by having been involved in the experience of shared reading and response. The most important lesson, it seemed, was the value in dedicating ourselves to the difficulty of *not knowing* where our engagement with the text would lead.

But why would not knowing become such a burden for us? Surely, as teachers, we understood the value of not knowing, the value of living within the ambiguity of a tension drawn between a presumed world of knowing and a possible one. Is it not the teacher's task to engage students in events which have the capacity to collect what is known, and through the process of *inquiry* (hermeneutics, we could say) shake loose the bindings of the familiarity of the known? Is our task not unlike the artist's — to make the familiar strange enough so that it provokes perception? Response? Interpretation? Or could it be said that this was *not* the way our teaching lives were constructed. Perhaps ambiguity and difficulty and not knowing were things which were avoided, smoothed over by the certainty of a daily curriculum which surrounded us and our students with the comfortable, predictable things that were already there. Perhaps our worlds of teaching were circumscribed by three things — what is out there in the world (the objective world), what is inside each human subject (the subjective world), and the artifacts we use to re-attach these (the various texts of curriculum) — instead of one thing: a shared, embodied, co-emerging relationship with the world. If so, could it be that in order for a literary text to be a part of that world, it needed to have some immediate, accessible, and well-announced purpose?

In the first part of the year that our group met, there was a strong desire, on the part of most members, to make literary selections that had the potential to be used as classroom texts. "I don't want to become part of this, if it's not going to be practical!" was a comment from one teacher who dropped out of the group after a very short time. The need for having something practical seemed always to be announced along with the need to be "economical" with one's time. Because reading required some commitment of time it seemed that the only way in which to justify "extra" reading was to at least not make it "extra-curricular." As a result, the first two meetings were devoted to readings of short stories which were felt by various members of the group to be suitable for classroom instruction. Although this instrumental approach to the meetings was quickly abandoned in favor of the more dedicated reading of lengthier, more complex works (including *The English Patient*), the issues of time and commitment continued to present themselves. What does it mean to "make time" to read, and how does an understanding of this help to illuminate our resistance to the difficulty of our commitment to *The English Patient?*

Margaret Hunsberger provides a phenomenological characterization of time that helps chart a path for this inquiry:

> It is a commonplace for us to speak of time as quantified, segmented, and invariant. We learn in school that a second is a small unit of fixed duration, that sixty of them make a minute, and that every minute is equal in length. This conceptualization is made manageable by, and dominated by, clocks and calendars. In our language, time becomes a sort of commodity; we recognize that we have a limited 'amount' of it and so we 'spend' time and we 'buy' time or we 'waste' a bit of it. But then we also say, do we not, that 'time is money'? And although, according to the clock, each individual has the same twenty-four hours available, some people appear to have more time at their disposal than others. To limit and constrain time in this way

is regarded as a convenience to make it manageable.[61]

Being able to use time wisely, then, might be considered a desirable trait within a culture that expects its citizenry to be productive. Just as time is founded upon metaphors of money and management, so too is schooling. Students are not to "waste time" in school; teachers, if they are to be considered "effective" must become efficient managers of time so that the learning of students might be maximized. In reading pedagogy this translates into a fixation on reading quickly and comprehending fully on the first pass through the text. Not surprisingly, then, when the question of what might characterize a "good reader" was raised in one of our group discussions, qualities of speed, fluency, accuracy, and retention were quickly listed. Good readers used time efficiently by not having to dwell too long in a text.

Given these beliefs it is not surprising that several group members should feel uncomfortable, edgy, worried, nervous, and anxious about the *time* it seemed to take to overcome their feeling of strangeness to *The English Patient*. When "good reading" is so closely aligned with speed, efficiency, and effective use of time, the need to "take more time" to read could be seen as a comment on one's abilities as a reader. And, of course, teachers of English *must* be good readers! Admitting that the reading of a text required a great deal of *time* suggests that the reader is less than proficient.

Additionally, because time is understood as a commodity that must be used wisely, teachers who are immersed in the bus(y)ness of schooling feel that it is not their *right* to take time to engage in what is often considered to be a solipsistic experience. Reading things that are not to become part of the daily curriculum, like books that students read outside the prescribed curriculum, becomes *free* reading. And free reading is so something that is done in one's *free* time. Although this is meant to mean the time that is not *committed* to the many requirements of daily life (as part of the curriculum), *free* could also be understood as something which either *does not cost* or something which is *liberating*. But of course, free reading does cost something: it costs time. And perhaps, in our culture, teachers are not supposed to engage in activities which liberate them, but instead in activities which *confine* them to the prescribed curriculum. In any case, whether understood as something not required, as liberating, or as not having commercial value, free reading is generally thought of as a *leisure* activity, something that one does when the required work has been accomplished.

In a way, free reading is considered a selfish activity. It is something which one does for oneself; something that is personal; something that does not contribute to the common good but instead serves some personal purpose. Engaging in free reading, then, is not really proper behaviour for persons designated to act in the service of others. As public servants, teachers are not supposed to demonstrate selfishness; they are supposed to dedicate their energy and *time* to their students. Taking time to read for oneself, instead of reading in preparation for one's students, then, could be seen as pedagogically incorrect.

Additionally, the question of "What has teaching done to teachers?" could be re-configured to read "What has the teaching of literary texts done to teachers' own readings of them?" Is it possible that the very experiences that inspired many English teachers to enter the profession (i.e., a love of the literary text) were refused them once they arrived at the schoolroom door? Could it be that treating the literary text as a commodity which functions as a vehicle for skills instruction and cultural transmission in the school classroom severely disfigures the teacher's own ability to abandon these instrumental practices in her own *free* reading? Could it be that the way in which the reading of literary texts is enacted in the secondary school curriculum contributes greatly to not only students', but to their teachers' inability to commit themselves to the often-difficult and time-consuming process of engaging *personally* with a literary text?

As Deborah Britzman[62] reminds us, teachers in our culture are supposed to *know*. Furthermore, teachers must be solely responsible for what they know. Therefore, even though it has been well established that literary texts are not vehicles for some stable, truthful meaning, the culture of teaching in most schools suggests that, like the math teacher who knows the solution to the riddle of the algebraic equation, the English teacher will know the answer to the riddle of the text. It is not surprising, then, that most teachers in our reading group demonstrated a strong need to *know* all the details of the text. It is how the members of our reading group felt:

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[61] Margaret Hunsberger, "The Time of Texts," in *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*, ed. William F. Pinar and William M. Reynolds (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 64.

[62] Deborah Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

> I felt responsible for knowing....I couldn't read on until I had looked things up that I didn't understand....I worried when I came to the group and found that others were mentioning details that I hadn't noticed myself....I guess I'm just not as good at picking out those symbols....I couldn't find the time to read this book in the way that it asked to be read....I'm going to have to read this book in the summer when I have more time....I'm too busy to read something this difficult—I'm too tired to read a book that is this demanding....I need more time....There's not enough time.[63]

In fact, as we continued to reflect upon our reading of *The English Patient,* we realized that the text was not really difficult. The plot was not really complex. Historical knowledge was not really vital to enter into a relationship with the text. Although the plot was not given chronologically, there was indeed a pattern to the structure. There was indeed a structure; it was just not one that we expected. The difficulty, the resistance, the ambiguity, it seems, could not really be located in the text, but rather resided in the inability for some readers to "listen" to the text, to wonder what the path of understanding might be, rather than determining the path ahead of time. But of course, as English teachers trained in an era where schema theory insists that "good readers" make predictions about what might happen next, we would, ourselves, both support and engage in this kind of reading behaviour. Although modern readers want to be surprised, they want the surprise to be an unexpected event, not an unorthodox structure. The surprise must be given rather than lived through.

For us, the difficulty of engaging with *The English Patient* became a demonstration of the other face of resistant reading. Although resistant reading has recently become known as the valued ability to "read across the grain" of the text in order to understand the way in which the text serves to reproduce hegemonic structures,[64] resistance can also be the inability to engage with the text. Resistance can be recalcitrance, stubbornness, the need to control.[65] As one reader, Ingrid, suggested, "With this book I didn't have any control, and I found that frustrating!"

And, in fact, the need to control the text should hardly be surprising in schooling situations which require teachers to control students, students to control themselves, and both to be in control of subject matter. As part of the much larger project of metaphysics, schooling events — and the reading events contained in them — have as their ultimate goal the "mastery" of the world and of our actions in it. Success in such a world is not only defined in terms of one's ability to achieve such mastery, but the ease with which one is able to accomplish it. Hence, the emphasis on reading quickly and efficiently, remembering details after one reading, being able to retell a recently read story accurately (with no additions or deletions). As part of the project of modernity, the reading curriculum, like the pedagogy which announces this curriculum, is founded upon not only expressing the world as it "really is" but being able to do so easily, comfortably, and efficiently.

It is no wonder, then, that modern readers often "resist" a relationship with a book that requires that they slow down, think, and wonder while they wander through the text. Not only does this take "time" that cannot be spared, it situates the reader in a situation of "not knowing" what the text will bring. I would argue that this other face of resistance, as made manifest in the difficulty of engaging with the text is, in part, a fear of where the line will lead, of what the path will yield, of what this unconventional "bringing forth" might evoke. Madeleine Grumet suggests that:

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[63] This stylized list represents "bits" from a number of comments made by all of the readers in our group.

[64] For example, Suzanne de Castell, Allan Luke and Carmen Luke eds. *Language Authority and Criticism: Readings on the School Textbook* (New York: The Falmer Press, 1989); E.A. Flynnn and P.P. Schweickart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) and Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Bill Corcoran, "Reading, Re-reading, Resistance: Versions of Reader Response," in *Reading and Response,* eds. M. Hayhoe and S. Parker (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

[65] Margaret Mackey provides an insightful discussion of this phenomenon in her article "The Many Faces of Resistance," *English Journal,* 82 (1993): 69-74.

> If reading is a passage between the public and the private world, the journey is fraught with danger. To give oneself up to the text is to relinquish the world in order to have a world; it is a birth and a death.[66]

And of course, as Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty have helped us to understand, new interpretations of ourselves in relation to our world always require a death of sorts. For although every new experience is the end-point of all those which came before it, it is also a point of recursion in which all that was past is understood differently. Although all of life is like that, some things, including committing oneself to a literary text can make these re-writings of self more obvious, more dramatic, and more disturbing. For when the literary imagination is invoked through the historically effected and situated interaction between reader and text, a world is brought forth by a perception that has been altered. And, as Varela et al.[67] suggest, once perception (literally and figuratively) is altered, the world is changed, not just the person.

Breach of Promise

> This group requires that everyone be here. We're attached to each other. When someone's not here, it's like we've lost a limb.
>
> Ingrid

> He slides his open palm along the sweat of her shoulder. This is my shoulder, he thinks, not her husband's, this is my shoulder.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* [68]

When Katharine arrived in the desert with her husband Clifton she did not know that her identity would change. Like any traveler, she assumed that she would simply spend some time in another part of the world, enjoy it, learn about it, and then return enriched with new knowledge and experiences. And, in fact, this is what it is like to be a tourist. As a tourist, one samples, looks, touches, collects souvenirs, tokens, images from the place visited, and brings these home and arranges them into an already-there life. And although, of course, these experiences affect one's perception of the world by making it "bigger," touring through a place is not the same as living in a place. Unlike touring, living in a place requires a commitment, a dedication — but most of all it requires a promise. A promise to do some things, and not to do others. These promises become the conditions of living in a place.

Touring, of course, does not just happen when one is on vacation. One can "take a tour" through a neighborhood or through a shopping mall. Touring in the latter can be "browsing" without committing oneself to buying. Once the decision is made to buy something, browsing becomes shopping. While browsing has no immediate goal other than the passing of time, shopping has a more distinct goal. One shops *for* something. Similarly, the goal of touring is ambiguous. Like free reading, touring is something that is done for pleasure, for oneself, for personal fulfillment. Readers can tour or browse through books. Browsing through a book means "checking it out," determining whether or not one wants to make a commitment to it.

Little is expected of the tourist or the browser, other than they be polite, and not destroy or steal anything. In fact, although we are always aware of tourists and browsers, we don't really consider them part of our lives; they pass before us in a procession line, nameless, faceless. We do not know them, they do not know us. We do not really live with them. We do not bring forth a world of understanding with tourists. So, after they have left, neither we nor they are much changed. The mark of touring (on ourselves and others) is faint, indeed almost invisible.

Katharine soon discovered the difference between touring through a place and living in a place. Unlike touring through the desert, living in the desert meant committing herself to a particular set of relations that she was thrust into. Although she had no prior history of the sorts of desert exploration, her recent marriage to Clifton meant that his history now became part of hers. Katharine learned that when we promise ourselves to somebody, we promise ourselves to the world that is brought forth in our relations with them. And so, Katherine's marriage to Clifton meant a marriage to a new world. Contrary to popular belief, however, this was not merely the conflation of her world and his through a process of accretion; rather it was a complete re-configuring of her sense of self in relation to the new situation.

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[66] Grumet, *Bitter Milk*, 136.

[67] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*.

[68] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 157.

As Katharine lived through the world brought forth through her relationship with her husband and all of the "others" in the place they dwelled (the desert), she necessarily became re-written. Her identity changed. *Living in* another place, rather than *touring through* that place, meant that she needed to become part of the evolving landscape. And as she re-drew the boundaries of her self through this process of living, she began to notice things she hadn't noticed before. Her new situation helped her to learn to perceive differently — perceiving not only things around her, but her self and her past self in different ways. Part of this re-configuration included the English patient, Count Ladislav de Almasy, her husband's colleague. He was a fellow explorer (not a tourist). And as she came to know him by living in a world which situated her with him, she found (to her surprise) that they were sharing a path. It was at this point that Katharine learned the difference between a contract and a promise, and as our reading group read about Katharine, we experienced this difference in our own relations with each other.

What is the difference between signing a contract and making a promise? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, certain legal texts have recorded precedents which make distinctions between promises and contracts. A contract involves the idea of mutuality, while a promise often does not. A contract is something negotiated, agreed upon. A promise is something given, often in the absence of any discussion or negotiation. A contract is explicit, while a promise is often not.

Herein lay the greatest conflict for Katharine, for she was involved in a marriage — a contract — with Clifton, and, at the same time, had made a promise to Almasy (the English patient). Although the promise in their relationship is never announced, it existed in the expectation of what their relationship might bring. Their involvement implied a promise of *more* — more time, more commitment, more of the other one. This illuminates the other difference between the promise and the contract; the contract is cast in the present, while a promise is cast in the future. As such, a promise, although tantalizing, is, at the same time often agonizing. Will the promise be fulfilled? Will events allow the fulfillment?

In reading, the difference between the contract and the promise is evident in what we say about our reading. In our group we agreed that we would all complete readings of various texts within particular periods of time. This was like a contract — a mutual agreement. The terms were established. At the same time, there was an implied *promise*. Although not spoken, it was implied that each person would *promise* to do their best to read well. Although not really part of the contract (all we said we'd do is *read*), our actions unmasked the promise. Each of us, in some way, brought concrete evidence to show that we had read *carefully*: we had post-it notes stuck in our books, journal entries to share, jotted scribblings or words and phrases we had looked up in dictionaries and other resource books. Just as Katharine, her husband Clifton, and her lover Almasy had to live amid a contract and a promise, so too did we, in our reading group live amid these — the contract to read; the promise to read carefully.

Like Katharine, who needed to decide whether to live with the contract or the promise, so too did each member of our group. For several, the promise was easily subsumed into the contract. For Anna, the primary feeling was one of responsibility:

> I felt a tremendous responsibility while reading this book. I felt responsible to both the author and the reading group to read well, to do my best.

Ruth, on the other hand, simply desired to repeat the experience of reading:

> I don't remember many of the details of the book, but I certainly remember the experience of reading it. That's why I re-read it—to re-claim the experience.

For Ingrid, however, the contract was chosen over the promise:

> I couldn't read this book the way I usually do. In order to understand the book I had to read it differently. I skipped ahead and read about the story of *one* character without interference from the other character's stories.

While for Mena, the juxtaposition of contract and promise was impossible:

> I really want to finish this book, but I can't seem to read it in the same way the others in the group do. I don't see all the images, the symbols. And I think that I *should* be able to see them.

We do not bring forth a world of understanding by ourselves. Through ongoing structural coupling with others in particular historically effected situations we grow to understand *a* world. Although Almasy had a personal relationship with Katharine, it could never be extricated from their shared world. Therefore, although Clifton was absent during their lovemaking, he was present. Just because things are silenced does not mean they do not exist; it does not mean they do not alter the world of understanding which is brought forth. Was this Clifton's wife's shoulder he was stroking or was it Almasy's lover's shoulder? Or was it simply Katharine's shoulder? Do we own our own bodies? Our selves? Our minds? Or do we share them with others through a process of living?

Is this what it is like to live between a contract and a promise? Although we had a "personal" reading of *The English Patient,* were we not aware that this book belonged to others as well? Were there not shadows of others in the same room while we read? Did we not feel watched? Did our implicit *promise* to read well not mean that we needed to remain aware of the other, the shadow that existed with us in our reading of the book?

Often, we are not really aware of things until they are broken. In *The English Patient,* Caravaggio better understands the value of thumbs since his have been removed. Almasy is more aware of his skin because it is damaged. Hana realizes how much she loved her father since he has died. It is the breach — the break — that provides the interruption in our usual patterns of living, forcing us to learn to live and perceive differently.[69] Therefore, understanding the importance of the promise to "read well" is better understood in the "breaching" than in the "fulfilling" of that promise. What happens when the promise to dedicate oneself to reading is broken?

During some of the conversations in our reading group the subject came up of what it was like to invite students to read or listen to literary texts that were personal favourites of the teacher. Whether students were asked to read these texts at home, to themselves in the classroom, or to listen to teacher's oral readings of them, all of us expressed increased anxiety about these shared readings. Because we loved these texts, and had established strong relationships with them, we hoped that our students would love them too. More than with other texts, we expected them to dedicate themselves to either reading or listening attentively. Although there was seldom a contract (an explicit agreement), there was an implied promise. When we said things to our students like, "This is a favourite of mine that I want to share with you," we were also saying, "Please listen attentively! It's important to me that you read carefully!" When students did not — when they looked bored; when they wrote notes while we were reading to them; when they told us that they couldn't/wouldn't/didn't finish an assigned reading of the text, we felt angry and hurt.[70] Ingrid told us about her experience of this:

> When I look up from my reading and see students looking like they could care less, I feel hurt; then I become angry! Because the story means so much to me.

For Anna, however, anger was not the primary emotion:

> I get hurt very easily. And as a teacher I wish that I could have — over the years — developed a thick skin. Because I do go home hurt by kids' comments about stories that I love. And I think that that makes me limit the number of these that I invite them to read.

Clearly, it is impossible to distinguish the self from the artifacts which co-exist (and co-evolve) with our relations with others. When students say, "This book is boring," they are not simply commenting on the book; in a very powerful way, they are commenting on our taste in books. They are commenting on us. Boring people read boring books. Although we make comments to our students which suggest that things and people are detachable — "I don't dislike you, it's your behaviour I dislike," or "Don't take it personally, I'm grading the essay, not you!" — our own experience of students' comments about *our* books shows that we don't really believe what we're saying.

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[69] It is important to understand that, although I have listed "living and perceiving" one after the other, I do not mean that the former causes the latter. Rather, they co-emerge together (mutually specify one another).

[70] I develop this idea more fully in my article "Of Seagulls and Glass Roses: Teachers' Relationships with Literary Texts as Transformational Space," *JCT: Journal of Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice* (forthcoming, 1994).

Our saying, doing, and being are *not* three things. They cannot be dissected and considered apart from one another. Sometimes we remember this. We would unlikely tell a person whom we care about that we hate their taste in clothes, their haircut, or their new car. Somehow, because these seem more clearly a part of that person we understand that saying "Your haircut is awful!" would hurt them. But because our relationships with books are largely invisible, we forget that they are as much as part of us as our hair. Therefore, we are more inclined to show our feelings about these: "I found that book boring. I couldn't even finish it."

Because the books we care about are part of us, we expect people who are part of our community to care for them in the same way they might care for us. This is likely why most teachers in our reading group reported taking "special" care to introduce books they loved to their students, making sure that the "personal" connection was announced. We seemed to understand that the presentation of the book could not be separated from the presenter of the book, and since this was the case, the usually invisible relationship needed to become more visible. When this special care and presentation is ignored, or disregarded — when the requested promise to "read well" is breached — a rupture occurs amid *all* of the relations in the classroom, for as discussed earlier, we do not merely form a relationship with a book, we form and maintain relationships with everything that is *not us.* In the school classroom, then, the teacher's relationship with the book becomes inextricably connected to *all* of the relations which contribute to her or his continued successful interaction in that community. When a student breaks the promise to dedicate him or herself to the text that is held in common, it is not only he or she that feels the rupture, it is the entire community.

The desire that the teacher has for each student to fulfill the promise of reading carefully and reading well, then, is not really a selfish desire. Although it is true that the teacher can become hurt and angry by non-readings or poor readings by students, these feelings do not constitute the greatest consequence of breach of promise. The most serious consequence arises from the fact that when students do not read, or do not read attentively, they effectively have removed themselves from the commonplace of curriculum. Not reading means not participating in the process of interpretation (of text, self, other). This does not simply mean that the non-reader exists *outside* of the circle of understanding. Just as Katharine could not banish the shadow of her husband Clifton from the circle of her affair with Almasy, the community of readers cannot banish the non-participant. Not reading does not merely affect the non-reader, it affects the entire world of understanding that is brought forth by the community of readers (in this case the classroom). Non-readers are, at the same time, present, but absent. Breaching the promise to read well (which means more than just finishing a reading, it means reading *carefully*) creates a rupture in all relations in the classroom (between teacher and text, students and texts, teacher and students, students and each other) that cannot be ignored.

Similarly, when one of the readers in our group was unable to complete her reading of *The English Patient,* a rupture was created by the breach of promise. Although we did not feel personally injured in the same way we did when our students performed this act, we nevertheless clearly experienced the shadow of the absence in our meetings. The breach of promise to read did not merely exclude Mena from the commonplace of reading and interpretation, it effectively excluded her from full participation in all of the shared relations which found their focal point in the shared responses. A sense of loss was felt by all members in the group. The breach created a tension which evolved from Mena's discomfort, our anxiety about her discomfort (for, of course, we had come to know her and care about her), and the difficulty of having to bring forth a world of understanding in the presence of this absence. As Ingrid suggested:

> This group requires that everyone be here. We're attached to each other. When someone's not here, it's like we've lost a limb.

Not reading the book and/or not reading carefully is not the opposite of reading. It is not a "non" action. It is part of the ongoing, ever-evolving action in the world. Specifically, "not-reading" becomes part of the "not-us" with which we must maintain ongoing structural coupling in a community of readers. Not doing is as noticeable and significant as doing. It becomes a material part of the commonplace. And although participation in these reading commonplaces can bring forth worlds of perception and living which are difficult, ...

> When I was growing up and going to school, reading really was a private thing. We wrote about our reading — in the form of essays — but we never did any personal response. I guess I'm still not used to it.[71]

...it is important to understand that we, the books we read, our relationships to these books, our fulfilled and unfulfilled promises, our commitments, our desires, are inextricable from the *not us* with which the other must maintain relations. This is important for us, as teachers, to understand, for as Madeleine Grumet suggests:

> Because schooling is a complex, ceremonial, and ritual form, it is important to study the status of texts in the exchange systems, totem systems of the classroom. For we have displaced school bodies with school texts. I do not ask my students, 'Do you understand me?' Instead I ask them to understand my reading of the text. We pass texts between us. We touch the text instead of each other and make our marks on it rather than on each other. The text is material, it has texture, it is woven; we pull and tug at it, it winds around us, we are tangled up in it.[72]

Dwelling

> I was surprised that there were so few pages in this book. It felt like a much bigger experience than the number of pages might suggest.
>
> Anna

> And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus's *Histories*, are other fragments — maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* [73]

The English patient's copy of *The Histories* — the only possession he managed to pull out of the fire of his plane crash — has, over time, become twice its original thickness. As the book lived with and through him and he through it, it became a collecting place for bits and pieces of a life. Newspaper clippings, notes, cuttings from other books — all became part of a commonplace. Not a *third thing* existing between him and the world, but rather an inextricable part of *a* world brought forth through ongoing structural coupling.

It is significant that the English patient read and re-read his commonplace book; adding, pasting, writing, contemplating, remembering — all became concrete ways of showing the way in which historical effect is always already present. But, at the same time, the commonplace book is not merely a collecting place, it is a living place — a place for living in and living through. It is not dead and dusty with the artifacts of the forgotten, gone, already passed; it is alive with memory, with building, with living, with thinking. As part of the English patient and his world, it becomes part of the ongoing process of living at the villa. It was not merely a building place for the English patient's world; it was a *dwelling* place.

In his essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*,[74] Heidegger inquires into the words "building" and "dwelling" in order to come to a deeper understanding of the essence of human existence. *Building*, he tells us, emerges from the Old High German word *baun*, which means to dwell — not merely in the sense of dwelling in a particular place, but as the very essence of being human. *Bauen*, in its original sense, is the same as the word *bin* as it occurs in the formulations *ich bin, du bist* (I am, you are). *Dwelling* is, most essentially, what it is to *be*. At the same time, *bauen* means to cherish, protect, preserve and care for. Dwelling, then, is not understood as simply existing; dwelling means living in a place with others with an attitude of caring and attention.

As the construction of a product, building cannot take place without dwelling, for as Heidegger suggests, "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers*."[75] The construction of things such as buildings, bridges, and the literary text is something which flows from dwelling in the middle of what Heidegger calls the Fourfold — earth, heaven, divinities, mortals. These constructions become "locations" which, as demarcated by the boundaries of their existence, become spaces which are, in essence, that for which room has been made. The boundary is not meant to be understood as something which contains or separates, but rather, as it emerges from the Greek word *peras,* as that from which something *begins its essential unfolding.*[76] A boundary is not really something which isolates or separates, but rather something which is created (built) *through* dwelling and *for* dwelling. For Heidegger, something like the literary text is something which belongs to dwelling (human existence), but, at the same time, is a deliberate construction (building) in order to create a location (a space) for which room is made. But room for what we might ask?

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[71] Mena

[72] Grumet, *Bitter Milk*, 144.

[73] Ibid., 96.

[74] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, 319-340.

[75] Ibid., 326.

Heidegger would suggest that the space opened up by the literary text (or a text like Herodotus' *The Histories* which functions like a literary text) becomes a dwelling place for thinking, particularly the kind of thinking which occurs in locations where one is situated (dwells) in the middle with an attitude of *listening* — of being more thoughtfully attuned to the other sense of building, where building is not construction, but *cherishing, protecting, preserving* and *caring for* that with which we dwell. This does not merely mean the *things* or the other *persons* around us. It means that we must care for our memories as these collect within the dwelling places (commonplaces) of our building and thinking. In our relationships with literary texts, then, *building dwelling thinking* means understanding that *doing, being* or *knowing* cannot be understood apart from one another. Like the English patient's commonplace book, which becomes a focal point for the inhabitants of the villa, so too did *The English Patient* become such a text for our reading group.

It is not surprising, then, that the experience of reading this book should be described as a "large experience" — bigger than the book would seem able to support. Like the English patient's commonplace book, which was twice its original thickness, our commonplace book was bulging with the experiences which we collectively brought to the readings. But why was this experience so large? Was it large because *The English Patient,* because of the way it was constructed (built), required us to read (dwell in) the text in a particular way which enlarged our experience? Was it that, through our dedication, our contract, our promise to each other, we read more carefully than we might ordinarily, thus making our experience deeper? Richer?

The preceding "hermeneutic windows" have allowed us to understand that both of these questions may be answered in the affirmative. Certainly, Ondaatje created a text which asked us to dwell within it differently than we were accustomed. Additionally, our dedication to each other and our inquiries likely contributed to a more conscientious reading than might otherwise have occurred for some of us. The "largeness" of the experience of reading, however, does not seem to be adequately accounted for by the structure of the text and our commitment to it and to each other. Rather, the quality of the shared reading experience seems to be most directly related to the way in which our shared reading of the text asked us to *dwell.* Here, again, Heidegger can be of assistance.

As derived from *baun,* to *dwell* means to remain, to stay in a place. When we read a text in the absence of any group commitment or responsibility, we have a different experience of dwelling, for unless we talk about our reading to others who have also read, the *dwelling* is limited to our own reflections on our reading. Although our dwelling in the text always lasts longer than the act of reading, and always extends into the after-reading reflections we have of our engagement with the text, "unshared" readings generally have fewer opportunities for "building" (bringing forth) larger response experiences. Dwelling in a text becomes a longer "remaining in a place" when a commitment to share one's response has been made. Aside from the fact that these commitments seem to foster more careful, dedicated readings of the text, the sharing creates a space for dwelling that may not ordinarily occur in the private reading. This "space" is the one which exists *between* the completion of the "private" reading and the planned discussion of these readings with others. When this endpoint (the collective sharing) has been decided in advance, the reader might be encouraged to "dwell" more than he or she would if there were not that future-point. The space created between the private reading and the discussion, then, becomes another kind of dwelling place which may be considered a *commonplace.*

During our group's reading and discussion of *The English Patient,* the commonplace of our dwelling together with and through our reading was comprised not only of our private readings and public sharing of those readings, but of the space of time between these readings. Each group member explained how usual habits of daily life were altered because of their commitment to read and respond. Several explained how they spent their lunch hours on the day of the reading group meeting reading and re-reading the chapter(s) that were to be discussed. Everyone mentioned the various ways in which they tried to become more attentive to the text by making notes, writing journal entries, looking things up in reference books. As well, everyone expressed both the need and the desire to re-read the text. In short, there was a general understanding that it was necessary to not simply appropriate meanings by reading the text; it was crucial to dwell for a period of time in and through the text.

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[76] Ibid., 332.

It is important to remember that dwelling is not touring. Like Katharine's experience in the desert, we needed to become attuned not only to the geography of the text we were reading, but also to the ongoing evolution of the relations between us that included our reading and response to the literary texts. Like Almasy's commonplace book, which kept on becoming "bigger" with each reading, so too did our own experience of reading. As a commonplace for our reading group's experiences, the literary text, then, became a particular *location* that otherwise would not have existed. However, this location did not function independently; it did not exist apart from the world in which it was contained. Like a "bridge" the text simultaneously connects, gathers, and becomes an inextricable part of the landscape in which it exists. Heidegger writes:

> With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus is guides and attends the stream through the meadows.[77]

Like the bridge, the literary text becomes a *gathering place* — a gathering place not only for our experience of reading the text, but, as readers who have been historically effected in different ways, for bringing together in a *location* those responses that, under ordinary circumstances, would likely remain unvoiced. It is important for us to understand that this *location* is not present in the absence of the literary text. The location is not the place (classroom) where we met to read, nor is it defined by any discussions we may have had about our experience as English teachers. Like a bridge, the literary text does not come to a location and stand in it; a location comes into existence by virtue of the literary text. It is this location, as announced by the presence of the literary text within a world that is brought forth together, which inspires the experience of the *commonplace*.

Heidegger helps us to understand that what we call the banks of a river are always perceived and understood differently when they become the points of attachment for either side of a bridge. The bridge and the banks are not two things which facilitate the crossing of the third thing (the stream). Rather, we perceive the three *in relation* to one another; the significance and experience of each is altered because of and for the others. Similarly, the literary text, as the "bridge" which united our disparate historically effected personal experiences (of reading and of reading as it existed in a life) became one thing — a commonplace. The borders of this commonplace became the site for the unfolding of an active construction — a building which co-emerged with dwelling.

As we continued to "dwell" in the location announced by shared readings of *The English Patient*, we became more and more aware of the way in which our co-labouring through the difficulty of this text was "bringing forth" or producing a particular world of significance that was altering our perceptions and actions in the world. We began to re-assess our understanding of good reading from "speedy tours" to thoughtful engagements with and "dwelling in." We began to realize the need to "listen" more attentively to the words given in the text, not so much to find their "truthful" meanings, but instead to listen for the possible location they announced for us. We began to learn that dwelling within the text meant listening to the text, and moreover, that dwelling in the text with each other meant listening to each other. Most of all, we learned that the locations — the commonplaces — of our reading together allowed a certain "pointing to the world" which did not exist in our private readings. When Anna mentioned how she had been taken by the image of Hana "unskinning" the plum before giving it to the English patient, we all began to think about the image of "unskinning" in relation to the lines:

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[77] Ibid., 330, original italics.

> But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense but to look for the truth in others.[78]

And with this connection, Ingrid wondered if that was what we were doing: Were we looking for the truth in each other? Did we expect the other to hold/know the truth in the text?

When others "pointed" to the world they had brought forth through their reading of the text, our own experience became larger. These "pointings" became like the English patient's clippings in his commonplace book — they became inextricably part of our individual experience of the book. Ingrid, for example, "pointed" to the passage about dog's paws...

> Her father had taught her about hands. About a dog's paws. Whenever her father was alone with a dog in a house he would lean over and smell the base of its paw. This, he would say, as if coming away from a brandy snifter, is the greatest smell in the world![79]

...suggesting that this was exactly her experience of paws:

> That's one thing I loved about my old dog that died. The smell of his paws. When I went to get my new puppy I just had to have a sniff of his paws!

And as Ingrid spoke about dogs' paws, I thought, "Ingrid loves dogs too!" Loving dogs became part of the commonplace of our reading location. Anna told us that she would not have the courage to smell a dog's paws because she was afraid of dogs, but that this passage had been evocative for her because it reminded her of the importance of hands. The way that hands can show a life:

> When I look at other people's hands, I am always aware about how hands have a life carved into them.

And with that comment from Anna I began to think of working hands. Hands that have grown callused, lined, gnarled from hard work. I thought of my mother's hands:

> You know, it's funny about hands. Lately when I look at my mother's hands I see them working. When I think of her, I think of her hands doing things like making bread, ironing — always moving.
>
> The essence of building is letting dwell.[80]
>
> We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience.[81]
>
> I loved that part about the smell of dog's paws.
>
> Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling. The two, however, are also insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation instead of listening to one another.[82]

The location announced by the decision to commit ourselves to shared readings and responses to a literary text requires a particular kind of thinking which co-emerges with dwelling and building. This thinking is never merely a thinking *about* something, but instead is a thinking *through* something. It is the running of the course, rather than the course to be run. But this running is not a running away, nor is it a running in place. It is the kind of building which does not erect monuments of truth. Instead, it is an embodied dwelling in which locations like those announced by shared readings of literary texts become a meditation, a *caring* about the words in the text, the words of others, the actions which these words support and announce.

As we continued to dwell in the commonplace of reading together, most of the members of our group began to understand that it was the building and the thinking co-emerging with dwelling that seemed to characterize the way in which we wanted to enact curriculum with our students. For us, the power of the literary imagination seemed to grow from our dedication to the text and to each other through the commonplace of our reading. As English teachers, I suppose we thought that we might better learn how to more effectively "teach" the literary text by reading together. However, although teaching was sometimes the subject of our conversation, I do not believe that any of us could say that we learned to teach, at least not if learning to teach means learning new techniques and skills for daily instruction. We did learn, however, what it means to dedicate ourselves to dwelling for a time together with and through the literary text, and it is through this dwelling together that we learned how to read. Not only how to read the literary text, but how to read and re-read our selves in relation to the world that was brought forth through our shared readings.

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[78] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 117.

[79] Ibid., 8.

[80] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 337.

[81] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 261.

[82] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 338-339.

But perhaps it is by re-learning how to read that we came to a deeper understanding of the literary text and the commonplaces of reading as these exist in the school curriculum. Although we came to no conclusions about how one should teach, we each came to consider our own teaching practices. Why were we reading particular texts in our English classes? This became an important question for Anna:

> I'm starting to really question the books that I ask my students to read.

Why did we attempt to read many things rather than dwell for a time in one text with our classes? Mena, too, began questioning her teaching practices:

> I'm learning the importance of re-reading, and I'm wondering why we don't allow time for our students to re-read?

Was it really because of the constraints of the required curriculum, or was it because we did not really believe that there was any value in prolonged dwelling? What does it mean to *dwell* in a text and with each other within schooling structures which do not value dwelling, but instead value producing? Is reading a form of building? Heidegger responds:

> [W]hat is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Nor is there just talk; there is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell.*[83]

Perhaps the real plight of reading, which is often considered in terms of "building better readers," is not in the inability to build quickly or efficiently enough, but rather in the resistance to make dwelling and thinking a part of that building. Perhaps instead of thinking about reading in terms of edifice building (productivity), we need to think of reading in terms of the other sense of building — a commitment to dwelling thoughtfully with an attitude of caring and attention to the texts that we read and to the persons with whom we read/dwell/think. In this sense, like all our actions in the world, reading could be understood as *building dwelling thinking*.

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[83] Ibid., 339.

Chapter Six

LAYING DOWN A PATH WHILE WALKING

I am experience. With each breath. Experience. Regardless of the context, I am running a course. ...*Currere* is to run.

William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet,
Toward a Poor Curriculum[1]

Everything we do is a structural dance in the choreography of co-existence.

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela,
The Tree of Knowledge[2]

Curriculum theory as a search for understanding, a meditative thinking, is an attempt to deal with unity rather than bits and parts additively....The intention is not to explain (flatten out) for control purposes, but to reinterpret in order to provide greater grounding for understanding.

James Macdonald,
Theory-Practice and the Hermeneutic Circle[3]

After that month in Cairo she was muted, read constantly, kept more to herself, as if something had occurred or she realized suddenly that wondrous thing about the human being, it can change!

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

In chapter two I discussed the character of the literary text, concluding that literariness was not to be located in the structure of the text, but rather in the culturally announced way in which readers are asked to interact with such texts. When a text is announced as literary, the reader understands that he or she must use the imagination in order for an aesthetic response to become evoked. By responding to the text through an imagination conditioned by features of the text, the reader comes to an understanding of a world that he or she may not ordinarily experience. Chapter three showed what it was like to enter into a relationship with a literary text. Using the novel *The English Patient* as a site for investigation, I attempted to show how the relationship with the literary work of art revealed as much about the reader as it did about the work of art. This relationship was not described as a *third thing* that exists between reader and text, but instead as attached to the person and the world, functioning along with the person in the evocation of a world. In chapter four, a theory of reading as embodied action was developed, showing the way in which all of our action in the world is part of an ongoing process of structural coupling between each person and the world. I coined the phrase *us/not-us* to signify the unity of this relationship. When the literary imagination is invoked through the act of reading, it *co-emerges* with all other relations in the unity of us/not-us. In chapter five I attempted to show, hermeneutically, how reading together is a form of embodied action. As part of *us/not-us* the texts that we read (by ourselves or with others) become inextricable from all of our actions in the world. At the same time, our history of structural coupling (historical effect) very much shapes how the text can be perceived and understood. Reading together was described as a process of bringing forth a world of understanding.

In this last chapter, I will elaborate on the idea of reading and curriculum as embodied action. First, I will extend my theory of reading as embodied action to a discussion of curriculum as embodied action. Next, I will present another series of "hermeneutic windows" in order to show the co-emergence of the literary imagination and the school curriculum. These will be primarily concerned with one question: How can the inclusion of the literary work of art and the teacher's relationship with the literary work of art contribute to the path of curriculum as it is laid down while walking?

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[1] William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet, *Toward Poor Curriculum* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 1976).

[2] Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge,* 248.

[3] James Macdonald, "Theory-Practice and the Hermeneutic Circle," 42.

[4] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 231.

Understanding Curriculum as Embodied Action

According to Jackson,[5] as a field of study, curriculum has been thought by various writers over the past several decades to be confusing,[6] in conflict,[7] amorphous and elusive,[8] and moribund.[9] It seems that the study and practice of what we call "curriculum" is difficult to pin down to a neat and tidy definition. However, although there is disagreement among some curriculum theorists, what is shared by all is that curriculum has something to do with what goes on in schools. Whether curriculum is narrowly defined as the subject matter that is taught, more broadly defined in terms of contexts of teaching, or still more broadly as all of the relationships (human or otherwise) which constitute the classroom, it is generally agreed that the study of curriculum has something to do with teaching and learning as accomplished by teachers and students within particular courses of study. Apart from this agreement, the field of curriculum, because it exists at the intersection of most discussions of education (psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, history, cognition, etc.), is extremely diverse, complex, and difficult to synthesize. It is, however, important to remember that all of our ideas are historically contextualized and effected. Therefore, before describing my own theory of curriculum as embodied action, I will provide a thumbnail sketch of several well-known and influential curriculum theorists, beginning with John Dewey and concluding with William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet.

In *the Child and the Curriculum* Dewey defined curriculum as "The course of study met in school [that] presents material stretching back indefinitely in time and extending outward indefinitely in space."[10] Generally speaking, Dewey believed that subject matter was something to be mastered by students; however, he did not believe that this subject matter should be seen as something fixed. For him, although the child and the curriculum were understood as two things, they could not understood as operating independently, but rather as being mutually engaged during the process of learning. Dewey argued that the culturally imposed boundaries between the child and the curriculum must be erased, and furthermore, that the experience of the child must be understood as comprising an integral part of what we call the curriculum.

It is significant that Dewey was born in 1859, the year that Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published. According to Schubert, there is a clear trace of Darwin's ideas about the connection between experience and biology within all of Dewey's philosophical works in education. This is most clear in Dewey's insistence that knowledge always emerges from human experiences, and, as such, is never fixed. Schubert suggests:

> For Dewey, there was no dualistic separation between mind and body, individual and society, work and play, nature and culture; rather, these apparent opposites had a reciprocal benefit for one another.[11]

In his major work *Democracy in Education*,[12] Dewey clearly explained that the purpose of schooling must not merely be a preparation for life, but must be seen as life itself. Dewey believed that school was a society in itself and, because of this, he believed that schools must be meaningful, purposeful places where students are able to exhibit industry, initiative, and social awareness and conscience. This did not mean that schools should be seen as isolated from society, for Dewey clearly saw the role of schools as places for the improvement of society through the preparation of future citizens who would be able to effectively live within a contingent and ever-evolving social world. However, like Darwin, who theorized evolution as a process of natural selection and adaptation, Dewey's philosophy of education typified much of the social Darwinism of the day by suggesting that students needed to be optimally adapted to the current social conditions. For Dewey, curriculum was understood as the complex set of relations among students, teachers, subject matter, and society. The teacher's responsibility was to oversee these relations, creating a set of conditions that would best allow the child to bring her or his experiences and abilities to full potential.

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[5] Philip Jackson, "Conceptions of Curriculum and Curriculum Specialists," in *Handbook of Research on Curriculum*, ed. Philip Jackson (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 3.

[6] For example, James Macdonald, "Curriculum Theory," in *Curriculum Theorizing*, ed. William Pinar (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1975), 5-16; and Hilda Taba, *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1962).

[7] Kieran Egan, "What is Curriculum?" *Curriculum Inquiry 8*, no. 1 (1978): 65-72; and Elliot Eisner and E. Vallance, eds., *Conflicting Conceptions of the Curriculum* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1974).

[8] John Goodlad, "Curriculum as a Field of Study," in *International Encyclopedia of Education*, vol. 2, eds., Torsten Husen and T. Neville Postlethwaite (Oxford: Pergamon, 1985), 1141-1143.

[9] Joseph Schwab, "The Practical: Arts of Eclectic," *School Review 79*, no. 4 (1969): 493-542.

[10] John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 5.

[11] William H. Schubert, *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, Possibility* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 72.

[12] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

Dewey's attempts to unify school experiences with general life experiences were effectively undermined by Franklin Bobbitt who, in his two influential books,*The Curriculum*[13] and *How to Make a Curriculum,*[14] insisted that the curriculum could be determined by scientifically investigating and delineating the desired qualities of adult life and translating them into behavioral objectives that would frame the school curriculum. Naming this procedure *activity analysis,* Bobbitt directed much of the work in curriculum which was to follow towards increased specialization as dictated by the perceived needs of society. Rather than seeing the curriculum and child as inextricably linked, as did Dewey, Bobbitt saw these as separate; the child was to be shaped by a curriculum which clearly mirrored the requisites of the social order. For Bobbitt, schooling was not life, it was preparation for some future life.

In addition to separating the curriculum from the child, Bobbitt removed the responsibility for curriculum development from teachers and gave it to "scientific workers."[15] These "scientific workers" (whom we now call curriculum developers, planners, and makers) were given the task of analyzing society, determining what knowledge was worth teaching, and translating this knowledge into behavioural objectives and activities. Teachers were given the task of "mak[ing] the educational adjustments"[16] demanded by an ever-changing society and delineated by curriculum scientists.

Essentially what Bobbitt defined as "the curriculum" was the endpoint of a process of analyzing a broad range of human experience within major fields (such as health activities, citizenship, recreation, the arts) and translating these into smaller "bits" which could be effectively incorporated into existing school subjects. The effective curriculum, for Bobbitt, was one which guaranteed that students would be given the knowledge necessary to make a specific and needed contributions to society.

Bobbitt's ideas had two major impacts on the field of curriculum: First, they removed curriculum development from the day-to-day practice of schooling and transferred it to universities and policy developers' offices. These curriculum developers, of course, participated (and still do) in the policing of knowledge. Curriculum became a way in which to maintain and support the status quo. Second, they provided a recipe for curriculum development which, because of its straightforward, unambiguous and relatively simple to follow method was quickly incorporated into many books and textbooks on the subject.

Beginning as the syllabus for a course which he taught at the University of Chicago, Ralph Tyler's small book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* was published in 1949.[17] It quickly became very popular and, according to curriculum historians Kliebard[18] and Schubert,[19] remains one of the most influential texts on curriculum ever published. It is considered a bit of an anomaly — not really a textbook, a theoretical treatise, or a philosophical explication of principles — but rather a very simply written book of general guidelines which, in his introduction, Tyler summarized as "a rationale by which to examine problems of curriculum and instruction."[20]

Consequently, the general principles outlined in the book have become commonly known as "Tyler's Rationale." This rationale is comprised of four broad questions, which were originally used as the chapter titles of his book: What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? and, How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?

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[13] Franklin Bobbitt, *The Curriculum* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918).

[14] Franklin Bobbitt, *How to Make a Curriculum* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924).

[15] Bobbitt, *The Curriculum*, v.

[16] Ibid., 41.

[17] Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[18] Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

[19] Schubert, *Curriculum.*

[20] Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction,* 128.

Schubert[21] explains that Tyler did not intend these four chapter titles to be used as a "method" for curriculum development. Rather, Tyler intended these to be conceptual organizers for much of the already-established work in curriculum, including that of Dewey and Bobbitt, but also of Charters,[22] Harap,[23] and Rugg.[24] In any case, the Tyler Rationale came to underpin for much of the work in the field of curriculum, particularly within the practice of curriculum development in schools.

It is generally accepted[25] that there was a twofold reason for popularity of the Tyler Rationale: First, Tyler wrote simply and clearly, reducing much of the previously verbose explications of curriculum design and implementation into a form and style more accessible and acceptable to the practitioner. Second, Tyler's rationale appealed to "commonsense" notions about the way things "really were" and, more specifically, the way in which human beings were thought to learn. Who could argue that one first identified the purposes of education, and then set about trying to find the most likely way to achieve objectives linked to those purposes? Firmly entrenched in an era which valorized the scientific method, rationalism, and empiricism, Tyler's rationale seemed like the voice of clear reason.

Twenty years later, Joseph Schwab wrote the first of four influential essays on the subject of curriculum. Written over a period of fourteen years (1969-1983), these essays remain influential to this day.[26] Primarily concerned with what he termed the "moribund" state of the field of curriculum, Schwab's essays accomplished three tasks. First they criticized the language of curriculum as being overly theoretic. Schwab felt that too much research and writing in curriculum was done from the sidelines, providing a great deal of commentary about the curriculum but little practical advice to practitioners. Second, the essays clearly defined an approach to curriculum inquiry that was based on what Schwab called the "arts of the eclectic" as these might be applied to the field of curriculum. Third, in the last essay Schwab discussed the role of the university curriculum professor in light of his "practical" method of curriculum inquiry, suggesting that the professor's role must shift from one of developing theories about curriculum to specifically educating and training individuals who would be able to engage in curriculum development in schools.

Schwab believes that inquiry into curriculum must be accomplished in the midst of the "commonplaces" of schooling: teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu. Curriculum building and development means, for Schwab, ongoing on-site investigations into the curriculum of particular schools, classrooms, and situations rather than general applications of over-arching theories applied to these situations. Essentially, Schwab believes that theory and practice co-emerge, but he does not believe that effective curriculum building occurs without a conscious deliberation of this co-emergent process. This continual deliberation into educational practice in schools is the essence of what Schwab considers to be the "art of deliberation." This deliberation is not to be about overly-general concepts of education, but rather investigations into the identification and solving of particular difficulties which emerge with the daily practice of schooling.

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[21] Schubert, *Curriculum*.

[22] W. W. Charters, *Curriculum Construction* (New York: MacMillan, 1923).

[23] Henry Harap, *The Changing Curriculum* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1937).

[24] Harold Rugg, *Curriculum Making: Past and Present* , Twenty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 1 (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing, 1926); and *The Foundations of Curriculum-Making*, Twenty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II (Bloomington, IL: Public School Broadcasting, 1926).

[25] In Jackson, "Conceptions of Curriculum and Curriculum Specialists"; Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum;* and Schubert, *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm and Possibility*.

[26] Schwab published four influential essays on curriculum over a fifteen year period: "The Practical: A Language For Curriculum" *School Review, 78* (1969): 1-23; "The Practical: Arts of Eclectic," *School Review, 79* (1971): 493-542; "The Practical 3: Translation Into Curriculum," *School Review, 81* vol. 4 (1973): 501-522; "The Practical 4: Something for Curriculum Professors to Do," *Curriculum Inquiry, 13,* (1983): 239-265.

Schwab does not believe, however, that teachers are able to accomplish this deliberation into curricular practices on their own. Instead, he suggests that teams of teachers, an administrator, a school board member and students be formed in schools. These teams should be chaired by a "curriculum chairperson" who is specially trained to monitor proceedings of the group, oversee the overall process of planning and implementation of the curriculum, and expedite the process of value and goal identification. These curriculum groups should function in the school to engage in ongoing curriculum development based upon specific, contextually appropriate goals. Schwab believes that this would effectively eliminate the tendency for the wholesale adoption of faddish theories (which are often developed in the absence of practice), and replace them with curriculum practices which are not a-theoretical, but rather informed by theories which are concomitant with those practices.

It is important to note that Schwab is not promoting anti-intellectualism, for he believes that persons who function as curriculum leaders in schools must have a broad intellectual background in order to be able to help with the ongoing interpretation of the curriculum. Because Schwab feels that problem identification must be followed with multiple approaches and perspectives (and thus possible solutions) to that problem, eclecticism in the form of intellectual diversity is crucial for success in on-site curriculum making and development. The role of university professors, then, becomes one of preparing such curriculum leaders, helping them to attain the intellectual diversity required for the demanding task of overseeing collaborative curriculum making.

In the early 1970's William Pinar announced the need to move away from "conceptual empirical" thinking in curriculum, towards what he termed "curriculum theorizing."[27] Using the verb form of theory signaled a radical shift from the instrumental approaches to curriculum inquiry and development to those which were more critically reflective of the existential quality of life in schools. Although Pinar's own writings drew primarily from existential philosophy and literary theory, the group of scholars who supported the shift away from conceptual empirical thinking included critical theorists, feminists, historians, and phenomenologists (to name a few). This loosely knit group was named by Pinar "the reconceptualists."[28]

Pinar's own reconceptualist work has focused on coming to a deeper understanding of the individual's lived experience of curriculum. In 1976, he and Madeleine Grumet published a collection of essays entitled *Toward a Poor Curriculum.*[29] In it, they describe an approach to curriculum theorizing that moved away from the conceptual empiricism of Bobbitt, Tyler, and Schwab (and their many followers). In addition, they described a method of curriculum research which called for

> a return to the experience of the individual, respecting all those qualities which disqualify it for consideration in the behavioral sciences: its idiosyncratic history, its preconceptual foundation, its contextual dependency, its innate freedom expressed in choice and self-direction.[30]

Because they understood that change in thought and action were inextricably connected to changes in language, they adopted *currere* as the word which would describe this reconceptualization of curriculum. *Currere* had been first used by Pinar in a paper delivered at the American Educational Researcher's Association Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. in 1974.[31] Etymologically related to the word curriculum, the verb *currere* is the Latin word meaning "to run," as in to run a course. As an approach to curriculum theorizing, Pinar suggested that *currere* was "not the course to be run, or the artifacts employed in the running of the course" but rather "the running of the course."[32]

Currere signaled an understanding of curriculum as the relationship between the individual and her or his world as it is contained in educational settings. By reconceptualizing curriculum as *currere*, attention was diverted from the artifacts of curriculum (documents, content, methods, strategies, teachers, students) to the relationships which bound them together and to the way in which these relationships evolved as they moved through time and space. Understanding curriculum as currere meant a move away from talking about curriculum as the subject or object of experience, to understanding it as the way individuals live a life that *includes* the experience of schooling.

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[27] William Pinar, ed., *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* (Berkeley,CA: McCutchan, 1975).

[28] This is announced in the introduction to *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* .

[29] Pinar and Grumet, *Toward a Poor Curriculum.*

[30] Ibid., 45.

[31] A version of this paper has been reprinted in a collection of Pinar's essays entitled *Autogiograhpy, Politics and Seuality: Essays in Curriculum Theory 1972-1992.* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

[32] Pinar and Grumet, *Toward a Poor Curriculum.*

Similar to Pinar's use of *theorizing* to describe the way in which theory evolves with living, currere points to the ever-evolving quality of curriculum. Because currere represents the human subject's existential experience of external structures, Pinar and Grumet believe that the method of currere must, in some way, help to more clearly disclose this. Beginning always with the experience of the individual, the method of currere seeks a "regressive-progressive-analytic-synthetic" process of inquiry. This means that any person engaged in curriculum theorizing must involve him- or herself in an ongoing reflection on her or his own past (regressive), ponder about what the future may hold in order to uncover hopes and aspirations (progressive), analyze what is uncovered in the regressive and progressive stages (analysis), and finally, once the present has been thoroughly and deeply excavated and analyzed, decision-making about one's situation (synthesis) occurs:

> More deeply, now, in the present, I choose what of it to honor, what of it to let go. I choose again who it is I aspire to be, how I wish my life history to read. I determine my social commitments; I devise my strategies: whom to work with, for what, how.[33]

In some ways, Pinar and Grumet's reconceptualization of curriculum through the method of currere is a re-collection of Dewey's belief in the importance of attention to the experience of the child and the curriculum. Like Dewey, Pinar and Grumet believe that curriculum is not to be the pre-determining of the path of life, but rather the *laying of the path while walking*. Not only did the method of currere greatly influence the field of curriculum by recognizing the importance of autobiographical, narrative, hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to curriculum inquiry, but it announced the need for greater attention to detailed analysis and interpretation of the relationships between experiences and expressions of curriculum.

Pinar and Grumet remind us that, like all human engagements with the world, currere is not the *course to be run*, but rather is the *running of the course*. Currere explicitly acknowledges that there can be no real boundary between school and life; the event of schooling becomes part of the daily walking of the path of life. Of course, this is not a pre-determined path; the path of life, as Buddhist philosophers have told us, is a path laid down while walking.[34] The path depends upon everything, and everything depends upon the path.

If we recall Maturana and Varela's theory of biological evolution presented in chapter four, we will remember that human evolution, as part of an ongoing process of structural coupling with a world, is always and forever in the process of mutual specification — of co-emergence. Each human subject, each lived moment, is always the end-point of historically effected structures. Both Heidegger and Gadamer knew this, hence their insistence that deep understanding of our present lived situation must always be understood in terms of the complex co-emerging relationships (human and otherwise) which are always situated historically. Human thought, language, and action therefore, are not three things; like the description of embodied reading where there was said to be no "natural" distinction between readers, texts, and meanings; thought, language, and action constantly co-emerge simultaneously through each moment of lived experience. In a discussion of the writing process, Ann Berthoff nicely describes these co-emergent relations:

> When we write, we are simultaneously naming, inferring, referring, recognizing, remembering, marking time, wondering, wandering, envisaging, matching, discarding, checking, inventing: all at once, we are carrying out these acts of mind as we are writing something down — or up — making meaning in the process. The challenge, as I say, is to take advantage of that allatonceness, not to fractionate, reducing composition to skills and subskills. We need to teach ourselves and our students to manage the complexity of allatonceness, to learn to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity, to

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[33] Ibid., ix.

[34] This is discussed in Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind*, particularly in chapters 10 and 11.

> recognize the value of *not* knowing what your thesis statement is and thus discovering the uses of chaos.[35]

Allatonceness. Currere. Chaos. But we don't want the curriculum to be chaotic, do we?

Chaos theory, or non-linear dynamic mathematical theory, was first announced by Edward Lorenz in the 1960s. In the process of doing some routine computer runs of a simulated weather system, he discovered that any small interruption in a process could lead to radically different patterns of organization in the final products.[36] Similar to Maturana and Varela's analogy of *natural drift*, chaos theory simply suggests that, in some way, *everything matters.* The world, our existence in the world, our relations with others, happen *allatonce.* Choosing to do *this* rather than *that* means that our entire patterns of living and the entire set of relationships to which we are connected will be altered for having made that decision. Discovering the uses of chaos, then, does not mean that our lives are to be lived in disarray, disorder, and confusion; rather, it means that we acknowledge that, although we have a *sense* of pre-established order in our lives, this order has, in fact, only emerged through our directed involvement in the infinitely contingent nature of our lived experience. This is inextricably related to our sense of self and identity, which does not emerge from some pre-determined plan, but rather from the history of interactions we have had with others in particular contexts and situations.

Currere acknowledges the existence and importance of allatonceness. It acknowledges that the path of curriculum is *laid down while walking*, and that the path will bend, wind, and turn depending on the way in which structural coupling and mutual specification occur. Dewey, of course, knew this when he insisted that the relationship between the child, the curriculum, and society must be continually acknowledged, particularly by those who have the power to make decisions about the forms in which curriculum is enacted. To a certain degree, even curriculum writers such as Tyler and Schwab, who argued for instrumental approaches to curriculum development and inquiry, had an understanding of the importance of contingency, for in the midst of their certainty about the need for pre-determined methods and processes, both insisted that curriculum is fundamentally that which is *lived through* not merely something which is the subject or object of discussion or debate.

Much of the work in curriculum, however, has ignored the allatonce, historically effected nature of lived experience, and instead has promoted the importance of *method.* Curriculum has, to a large extent, been understood as the course to be run rather than as the running of the course. Emerging from a tradition of analytic philosophy and scientific inquiry which has attempted to eliminate the possibility of error by pre-determining a logical and rational method, curriculum has become commonly known as something which is clear, unambiguous, and certain (one could say *truthful*). Work in curriculum has generally been understood as the creation of a clear set of "directions" which guide the interactions between students and teachers so that predictable outcomes might be realized.

It is this approach to curriculum and instruction as "method" which has perpetuated the fundamental severing of curriculum from life (from the world). Hermeneutically speaking, this striving for method is a response to our condition of no longer being at home in the world, largely as a consequence of being unaware of our historically effected presence. Method aims to stand in place of this loss of historical understanding and belonging by substituting reflective knowledge with a form of knowledge which pretends to understand everything in advance. Method seeks to exclude the unexpected, the accidental, the mistake. Just as Descartes believed that disciplined human reason could protect against error, the curriculum which is founded upon pre-determined methods and plans believes that adherence to these will ensure effective teaching and learning.

By focusing on the running of the course, currere acknowledges the importance of the chaotic, the ambiguous, the serendipitous, the unanticipated, the unexpected, the surprise, the discovery, and the way in which *any* event, *any* relationship in some way affects the continual laying of the path of experience. Translator and explicator of *Truth and Method,* Joel Weinsheimer, calls these "haps," suggesting that the hap is something which

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[35] Anne Berthoff, *The Sense of Learning* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990), 86.

[36] See James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), for an accessible description of chaos theory.

> makes its presence felt when one happens onto something, in the haphazard guess, the happenstance situation, in happiness and haplessness .... The Hap eludes the hegemony of method.[37]

The hap, then, is what remains after method; it is what occurs beyond what we predict; it is what exists beyond our willing and doing. The hap may be understood as all the moment-to-moment contingencies experienced in life that are in no way predictable, but, as much as anything which might be predictable, contribute to the ongoing pathbuilding of the course of our lives.

It is important to understand, however, that we should not stand helpless before life believing that we should not attempt to avoid error and mistake. Even Gadamer does not suggest that we should not strive for the elimination of errors. Determining methods in life for the possible elimination of error are, of course, important. He suggests that "the hermeneutical interest of the philosopher ... arises only where the avoidance of error has already been achieved."[38]

The hermeneutical interest, then, is not with the mistake which can be avoided through methods, but rather that which remains — the hap. For it is the hap which usually catches our attention with an unexpected arrival which, *if interpreted,* can bring us to new awareness and understanding of our situation. If all life proceeded according to the pre-determined path of methods, nothing new would occur; science, language, relationships, learning would remain fixed, final, complete. The hap, however, is often ignored, marginalized, and devalued in our retrospective discussions of events. Because the hap is seen as "the remainder" — as something which lives outside of planned or valued experience — it, like the *daydream,* the *fantasy,* and the *imagination* is often not recognized and, as a consequence, not interpreted. Like many of the details of our daily existence that seem too banal or mundane to mention, the hap is often lost in public announcements of past events.

When the idea of the remainder — the hap — is applied to the study of curriculum, the importance of currere becomes evident, for in its emphasis on movement forward, currere embraces the possibility for the hap to not only be *noticed,* but to be *interpreted.* Running the course means understanding that there is likely to be some ambiguity, some resistance, and some difficulty to be overcome, as well as unexpected, unanticipated, and surprising events which alter the course. If the course is understood as one which is "laid down while walking," these unexpected details are not ignored, brushed aside, or marginalized, but rather are always considered part of the course — and depending upon their value (as determined through interpretation), may fundamentally affect the direction of the path.

This, in no way, is meant to suggest that we are *determined* by the course, nor that we *determine* the course, but rather, as in the earlier formulations of cognition and reading as embodied action, that the course *co-emerges* with all of the historically effected components which continually interact during the lived experience of curriculum. Moreoever, it is important for us to understand that currere always exists at the intersection of the biologically and phenomenologically effected structure of our bodies. Curriculum, then, may be described as *embodied action* which is inextricable from the ever-evolving world in which we live.[39]

It is the attention to the co-emergent nature of the components of the course of living that signals the most important quality of curriculum as embodied action. By paying attention to what is *hap*pening during the lived curriculum we can become more attuned to the contingencies which *make a difference.* Locating these moments (these haps) amid the planned structures of our lives can help us — as curriculum inquirers, teachers, learners — to initiate the ongoing interpretations which keep us more *mindful* of the unfolding events of the lived curriculum.

For the remainder of this chapter I would like to present another series of hermeneutic windows which, I believe, performs interpretations of the announced character of curriculum as embodied action. Each of these interpretations takes as its focal point some point of experience that for me, as a curriculum researcher, was "haplike." It is from these, that I have attempted to show the fullness of the complex, co-emergent relations which comprise the school curriculum that includes the invoked literary imagination. At the same time, I have attempted to integrate further interpretations of the ideas of curriculum and reading as embodied action.

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[37] Joel Weinsheimer, *A Reading of "Truth and Method"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 8.

[38] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* xxi.

[39] The idea of currere as embodied action was used as the theoretical centerpiece for a chapter I wrote entitled "A Path Laid Down While Walking: Curriculum Development in High School English Programs" In *Curriculum Planning in the Language Arts K-12: An Holistic Perspective,*. edited by Trevor J. Gambell and Mary Clare Courtland (North York, ON: Captus Press, 1994). It was in during the writing of this piece that I began to understand the contribution that enactivist theory might make to curriculum theorizing.

Touring

> The high school English curriculum is very demanding. We have to cover so much material that there is no time for re-reading.
>
> Anna

> We've spent a whole month on *The Chrysalids!* All the other grade ten classes are already on *Julius Caesar*. We're way behind, already.
>
> Jason, *grade 10*

Reading *The English Patient* together helped the five members of our reading group re-learn how to read. Our most important discovery was the importance of deliberately taking time to dwell with a text. And although we knew that it was this dwelling that allowed the artwork to become most powerfully evoked, we also knew that these experiences seldom occurred in the secondary English classroom. Although there were times in our teaching when we had asked students to read poems more than once, seldom (if ever) did we ask them to do this with novels or short stories. Yet, each of us who finished *The English Patient* realized that the first reading had merely provided us with a rough map of an experience — a mere promise of what might be if we were to re-read. Now, mapped by desire, we abandoned our touring and began to dwell with the text. And it was this dwelling which permitted a powerful building and thinking.

According to Arthur Applebee's recent study of literature teaching in the United States, literary texts contribute to up to eighty percent of activity in the secondary English classroom.[40] James Britton and Merron Chorny have reported similar patterns of instruction in Canada and Great Britain.[41] Now, this might seem encouraging, for it appears to suggest that there would be ample opportunity in the English classroom for both students and teachers to dwell with and through the lived experience announced by the conditioned literary imagination. Clearly, if students and teachers commit themselves to texts which require that the imagination be invoked for meaning-making to occur, the abundance of literary readings would seem to create the kinds of transformative commonplaces that we, as a reading group, experienced in our reading of *The English Patient*. Given the acceptance of various theories of reader response in day-to-day classroom practice,[42] this possibility would seem to be exponentially greater than previous decades which focused upon "close readings" of texts. But is this really so? Do students in the secondary English classroom dwell with texts or do they merely tour through them? Are there commonplaces for interpretation created in the English classroom, or does the use of the literary text amount to a brief stop, where students rush off the bus, take a few pictures, grab a bite to eat, relieve themselves, and then rush back on the bus to await the next destination? Are English teachers literary tour guides? Are students' experiences in the English classroom similar to the guided tour?

It is not surprising that many world travelers prefer the comfort of pre-booked guided tours. Given the busy-ness of modern life, seeing the world is certainly best accomplished according to pre-determined plans which have been drawn up by someone who has been to these places before. Why would anyone want to cope with the difficulty and the ambiguity of traveling through foreign countries on one's own — learning by trial and error, so to speak — when the alternative is an all-inclusive pre-booked tour to be experienced within the safety and comfort of a friendly group of fellow tourists who speak the same language? In addition to this initial expediency of planning, the guided tour is *efficient;* rather than bungling one's way through one or two countries in three weeks, a guided tour allows one to see *many* countries — and, of course, a vacation is always better if one has seen *more.* But is this really so? Do we see more during the guided tour, or do we merely cover more ground? Is moving through space the same as dwelling in a place? What is the difference between touring through a foreign country and dwelling through one?

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[40] Arthur Applebee, "The Background for Reform," in *Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response*, ed. Judith A. Langer (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992).

[41] James Britton and Merron Chorny, "Current Issues and Future Directions," in *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, eds. James Flood, Julie M. Jensen, Diane Lapp and James R. Squire (New York: MacMillan, 1991.

[42] For a good overview of various theories of reader response see Richard Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993).

Of course, not knowing the precise trajectory of a vacation does not mean that plans are not made. It is clear that travel still needs to be booked,and, to some degree, so do accommodations. However, in a more improvised vacation, the plans are not *overly determined.* Room for play is left in the system. The differences between touring and dwelling become most apparent when one has arrived at the airport of the foreign country, particularly if it is a country where another language is spoken. Once one has left the safety and familiarity of the airplane, one is thrust into the middle of the unfamiliar. Where is the luggage carousel? Where is the customs office? How do I get to my hotel? What do I do if I am not understood?

As we blunder our way through some of these difficulties — as we lose our way enroute to customs, take the wrong bus, finally get off and find a quaint coffeehouse, abandon our little tourist map and allow ourselves to be led by the ebb and flow of the crowd into the flower market — we learn again what we knew as children. We learn that being thrown into the middle of the world can be *exciting* if we don't know what is around the next corner. We learn to walk with our eyes and ears wide open; we become more mindful; we notice details we hadn't noticed in our more familiar world. We re-experience the importance of what Merleau-Ponty has called conducts[43]—the way in which our consciousness is shaped by our perceptually guided action in a world which contains others who are similarly involved in such action. When the familiar is rendered strange — as often occurs during travel in foreign countries — we become more aware of the conducts being enacted around us. And, as we simultaneously perceive and act, we learn. We begin to dwell again. At the end of a day filled with new conducts, we usually sleep better — not because our vacation has brought rest and relaxation (for we have probably worked much harder than in our usual world), but because while learning how to locate the toilets, how to order a coffee, and how to find the right bus, we were learning (again) that our bodies and our minds work together in bringing forth a world.

And, of course, this is precisely what it is like to dwell in the literary text. Engaging with the literary text means becoming immersed in situations which are not completely given — ones which require that the reader invoke the imagination, as conditioned by the text, to learn to see again. As Madeleine Grumet reminds us, "It is the function of art to reorganize experience so it is perceived freshly."[44] And, like the feeling of finding oneself lost in the middle of some foreign city, it has, as Susan Sontag suggests, the ability to "make us nervous."[45] But as products of the historical effect of modernity, we, in the Western world at least, do not value feeling lost or nervous.[46] We don't like dwelling; we like touring. However, as shown in the last chapter, the literary text asks for dwelling, for it is only by dedicating oneself to the difficulty and ambiguity of dwelling with the text that a commonplace for interpretation and understanding can be evoked.

We who choose to commit ourselves to literary texts know this. We know that dwelling with texts requires a dedication and commitment. Although we do not do it with all of the literary texts we read, there are some that we choose to dwell with again and again. Over the course of our lifetime we re-read them, not to recapture the original experience of reading, but rather to re-engage our most recent experiences within the location announced by the text. Like the English patient's commonplace book, the location gathered together through our engagements with these texts become increasingly fatter, for, like memory itself, the commonplaces of reading are collective phenomena.

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[43] In his essay, "The Child's Relations with Others," in *The Primacy of Perception,* Maurice Merleau Ponty suggests that the psyche is not a series of "states of consciousness" that are closed and inaccessible to others, but rather that a person's consciousness is "turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world" (p. 117). It is through the noticing of the ways in which others engage in a relation with the world (their "conducts") that I am able to know them.

[44] Grumet, *Bitter Milk,* 81.

[45] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 8. With this phrase Sontag points to the way in which the artwork can speak ontologically. I use it here to signify the inherent ontological value that many of us who read and teach literature see in the literary work of art and its potential to help us to understand ourselves differently (perhaps nervously).

[46] See John D. Caputo's introduction "Restoring Life to Its Original Difficulty," in *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987), for an insightful commentary on the avoidance of difficulty and ambiguity in Western cultures.

Because the shared readings of *The English Patient* existed with the day-to-day teaching of the high school teachers in the group, our recently articulated desire to promote dwelling with texts rather than touring through them began to have an affect on the curriculum decisions that were being made. Mena, for example, decided that she would try not to cover as many poems and short stories in her upcoming thematic unit on "War" as she had in the past and would, instead, select several with which to dwell with her students. However, reducing the number of items taught was a difficult decision for Mena and for the other teachers, since, like any tour, the tour through literature seems better if more is covered. Like many schools which are large enough to have an English department, teaching success and efficiency was marked by where one "was" in the mandated curriculum. This had nothing to do with *dwelling*, but instead with *locating*.

"I'm just finishing my short story unit and moving on to poetry."

It also had to do with the efficient movement and distribution of materials.

> "I'm starting my novel unit next week.
> Will you be through with the class sets
> of *To Kill a Mockingbird?"* [47]

Even though the teachers in our group had recently understood the importance of dwelling with a text, they remained caught up in a school culture which defined effectiveness by the amount of material covered and the efficiency with which one was able to work within pre-designated time schedules. Not only would dwelling longer in a text be understood as a sign of ineffectiveness, it would create a hitch in the materials distribution system. It would be like missing a bus. And in schools one is not supposed to miss buses. One is supposed to be on time, on schedule. Times and places are things to be mastered — ironically, making both teachers and students slaves to them.

The desire to be on time and in the right place has lead to the phenomenon known as "covering the curriculum." In the English classroom, this has generally meant that the reading of literary texts has become buried under the covering of the efficient use of materials, time and space. Although students and teachers still sometimes find themselves dwelling in texts, this dwelling is often buried alive by the thick patchwork quilt of syncretism. For although many teachers have taken up reader-response in the classroom, they have largely not abandoned the close reading of texts.[48] It is a somewhat uneasy alliance, with the former being generally used as a mechanism for efficient entries into and exits from the text (with pre-reading questions like: "What sorts of things do people do to get more power?" before reading Hamlet; or post-reading questions like: "Did this play remind you of anything in your own life?"), while the latter serving to satisfy the ranking and sorting functions of schools by asking questions that have pre-determined answers (What is the theme of Hamlet? What symbols are used?).

Although these largely opposing critical practices have been adopted in the school curriculum, this has not occurred without creating some tension. Both Anna, and Ingrid, for example, who were about to begin units which included readings of novels, began to question (again) the way in which they might approach these readings with their students. Although Ingrid had, in the past, assigned chapters to be read followed by a series of questions for each chapter, she was not convinced that this was the best way to "dwell" within *The Chrysalids*,[49] a book she had chosen for her academic stream grade ten class. Because this book formed the focal point for her planned anti-racism unit, she wanted students to have as deep a relationship with this book as possible and was not convinced that this would happen if she intervened too forcefully while that relationship was being established. At the same time, Anna was wondering how her non-academic grade eleven class might successfully dwell with the book *Forbidden City,*[50] which she had chosen for them. Although she found herself very much caught up in the book, and felt that students would identify with the characters and their situations, she was not convinced that they would have the reading skills or the patience to form a meaningful relationship with it.

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[47] Yes, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: F. Watts, 1960) had a very active life in this school.

[48] This has been well documented by a number of writers in the field. See, for example, Patrick Dias and Michael Hayhoe, *Developing Response to Poetry* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1988); Richard Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993); and Robert Probst, "Response to Literature," in *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, eds. James Flood, Julie M. Jensen, Diane Lapp and James R. Squire (New York: MacMillan, 1991).

[49] John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* (Markham, ON: Penguin Books, 1958).

Important questions began to present themselves. How does one read with students? Did dwelling with a text in the English classroom mean reading the entire text to oneself? Did it mean keeping a response journal while reading? Did it mean reading chapters aloud in class together and talking about these readings? Did it mean stopping at the end of each chapter to critically reflect upon one's understanding of the text and the relationship one was forming with it? What was the teacher's responsibility in all of this? Was the teacher to become a "tour guide," taking students through the text, pointing to sites along the way? Or was the teacher to simply allow students to wander through the location announced by the inclusion of the literary text in the classroom?

If one understands reading as embodied action, where the text becomes part of the *us/not-us* world with which we strive to maintain a relationship, it would seem that neither "touring" nor "wandering" are appropriate. Touring suggests that the world of the text is "out there" waiting to be experienced, appropriated, collected in a series of snapshots that then become part of having "been there and done that." Touring suggests that some sort of orienting "map" is required and some decisions about the purposes for touring be made in advance. It also implies that outside help might be required. These might be book reviews or recommendations from friends, teachers, or other sources. Wandering is more like aimless browsing without any particular purpose or any pre-determined assistance or advice. Wandering (what we might call "allowing students their own experience with a text") can lead to discovery and dwelling, but it can also lead to becoming lost and never found — and of course, although lost and found is an exciting game, remaining lost means that the promise of the game remains unfulfilled.

Recent literature which addresses the experience of reading suggests that experienced, skilled readers choose literary texts for a variety of purposes and approach their reading differently depending on these purposes.[51] Sometimes browsing and wandering through texts is appropriate and necessary; sometimes guided tours are essential; often dwelling, in the form of re-reading, is valued.[52] Most of this literature, however, discusses the kind of reading that occurs between one reader and one text, which, although providing important insight into the experience of reading, falls short of considering shared readings in the classroom setting. Generally speaking, literary texts that are used in the classroom are meant to fulfill functions other than might be expected of the one-on-one reading encounters. It is common practice for literary texts to function as vehicles for skills instruction and for transmission of cultural heritage.[53] Although there has been a movement, in the last two decades for promoting personal response to reading,[54] because this movement as been concurrent with a desire to teach students to read critically and with some resistance,[55] there has been considerable confusion among English teachers as to how all of these approaches to reading might be incorporated into day-to-day classroom practice.[56]

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[50] William Bell, *Forbidden City* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1990).

[51] For example, J.A. Appleyard, *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction From Childhood to Adulthood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Victor Nell, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Peter Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[52] For an insightful essay on the experience of re-reading see Margaret Hunsberger, "The Experience of Re-reading," *Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 3,* no. 2, (1985): 161-166.

[53] In *Growth Through English,* John Dixon summarizes the proceedings of the three week Anglo-American seminar on the teaching of English held in Dartmouth, New Hampshire in 1966. In it, he outlines three models of instruction that were in evidence in English language arts classrooms in both the United States and Great Britain: a "growth" model, a "skills" model, and a "cultural transmission" model.

[54] Emerging primarily from the work of literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938) and *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); and Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[55] For example, Suzanne de Castell, Allan Luke and Carmen Luke, eds. *Language Authority and Criticism: Readings on the School Textbook* (New York: The Falmer Press, 1989); Margaret Mackey, "The Many Faces of Resistance," *English Journal,* 82, (1993): 69-

It is not surprising, then, that all of the teachers in the reading group proved to be syncretists, using various approaches for reading and teaching the literary text. However, even though they all demonstrated a general understanding of these various teaching approaches, it seemed that the literary text was used largely as a site for touring. From our discussions it was apparent that most of the teachers guided students through assigned readings of one text, followed by some personal response, some critical response, general class discussions, all ending with a writing assignment — usually an expository essay. Response journals were largely not used, because, according to the teachers, they were overused in junior high school. "The kids were journaled to death in junior high school. They don't even want to hear the word 'journal' in high school!" was Anna's comment.

Therefore, as in many high school classrooms, students' and teachers' engagements with literary texts were largely efferent events where the text served as a site for touring. Teachers were tour guides, students were tourists. The tours included some pre-touring information (a bit about the book), sometimes some research into the pending tour site (background information), some pointing out of the most important sites (notice the character development here, the symbols there, the use of language here), and some general discussion and response, usually led by the tour guide (Any questions? How did you feel about that?).[57]

In our discussions of our own reading, we agreed that although guided tours through literary texts were sometimes necessary, especially for students who were unfamiliar with the geography of the literary text, our recent experiences led us to believe that there needed to be more dwelling and less touring. Therefore, although Ingrid typically led students through tours of texts, she decided that the class reading of *The Chrysalids* would not be a tour. Because she wished her students to have as powerful a response to the book as she had, and for the relationship between they and the book to be strong, deep, and personal, she decided to require students to read on their own.

> I want them to form their own relationship with the book, without my influence, or anyone else's influence in the class. It's really important that they experience this on their own. I don't think that some of my students know what it means to be marginalized and hated. I think that they need to understand what that feels like. This book will give them that experience.

Although Anna, too, had selected a novel with which she wanted her students to form a personal relationship, she was unconvinced that her grade eleven, non-academic stream students would be able to do this by themselves. Not only had most of them never read an entire novel on their own, she knew that nothing she could say or do could entice them to read *Forbidden City* by themselves.

> Many of my students will not read this on their own. Some can't read very well, some just don't and won't read. Many of them have very difficult lives; several live on their own without the support of parents or family. I think that they might learn something by reading this book, and so I think that I need to read it aloud with them in class.

Both Ingrid and Anna believed that if their students could enter into a relationship with these literary texts that they would learn something

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74; E.A. Flynn and P.P. Schweickart, eds. *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Bill Corcoran, "Reading, Re-reading, Resistance: Versions of Reader Response" in *Reading and Response*, eds., M. Hayhoe and S. Parker (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

[56] Patrick Dias and Michael Hayhoe give a thoughtful and insightful overview of some of the difficulties arising from these competing literary theories in *Developing Response to Poetry* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1988).

[57] It is interesting that many of these questions are precisely the ones which Judith Langer, —*Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response,* p. 42 — suggests might emerge from a "new" theory and "method" of literature instruction in schools that would, in her opinion, improve current approaches to teaching. I found her suggestions to be rather frightening in light of what I understand to be the function of the literary imagination in the school curriculum.

about themselves and their relationship with their world. Although they both acknowledged the importance of developing literacy skills, it was made abundantly clear in our conversations that for them the literary text had the potential to announce a particular location — an interpretive commonplace — for their students. However, each, in their own way, wanted to ensure that their students' experience would be neither a guided tour, nor an inattentive wandering through the text. Anna had some concerns about the appropriateness of the novel she had selected:

> Some of the other teachers think that this book is too difficult for English 23, but I want to use it because I think that, like the Chinese students in the book who have very few choices, some of my students believe that they have few choices. I think that if we can really get into this book, they might understand their own situation more deeply.

Although Ingrid did not question her choice of material, she was concerned how her students might engage with it:

> I am hesitant to just let them read this book on their own, for although I think they are all able to read it, I am concerned that they may not read it carefully enough. If they're going to have a strong relationship with the book they have to listen to what it is saying!

Does reading the literary text aloud to one's students imply touring? Does asking them to negotiate the readings on their own risk aimless, inattentive wandering? Can either of these approaches lead to the kind of dwelling that we valued in our reading of *The English Patient?*

Tucking

> When I was a kid ... I believed I could fill myself up with what older people taught me. I believed I could carry that knowledge, slowly altering it, but in any case passing it beyond me to another.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[58]

> I was surprised that there were so few pages in this book. It felt like a much bigger experience than the pages might suggest.
>
> Anna

Many of the students in Anna's non-academic stream grade eleven class had experiences which were unusual for their age. Several were parents; some lived on their own without the support of family; two were recent immigrants from Asia and had difficulty with the English language; several were prone to emotional outbursts in class. According to Anna, many felt that school had little to offer them. Like the characters in *The English Patient,* many were wanderers — nomads — unaccustomed to dwelling. And so, it was not surprising that although most of them *could* read, they generally chose not to. Anna worried about this resistance to reading, not only because she felt that they needed reading *skills,* but because she believed that they needed a reading *life:*

> I want my kids to be able to understand what life is like for young people their age in countries like China. Because I think that they think that most of the world is like Edmonton. Even though they watch TV, they don't seem to really understand the differences between life in Canada and life elsewhere. They have such small lives right now, and they think that they must choose from within that life. I want their world to be bigger!

And so, Anna was disappointed when, as she passed out new copies of *Forbidden City* to this class, students responded negatively. "This book is too thick!" "Look how small the print is!" "This looks really boring!" Anna couldn't help but think that maybe her colleagues were right. Maybe she should have found a simpler book, one that would offer them a more accessible, comfortable reading experience. But Anna didn't want them to feel comfortable. She didn't want to remain in the confining boundaries of the world they knew and understood. She wanted to re-map their experience and help them to understand that boundaries were meant to unfold into new paths, not confine old ones. Although she was hesitant about making the decision to use the novel *Forbidden City*, she felt certain that if students could tolerate the difficulty of the experience of reading it, they would somehow bring forth a different world of understanding.

Forbidden City is an historical fiction founded upon the events leading up to and including the massacre of Chinese university students in Tian An Men Square in 1989. The main character is a Canadian teenager named

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[58] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 283.

Alex who has come to Beijing with his father who is a news cameraman posted to China for one year. Shortly after their arrival, the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tian An Men Square begin, and later, when the demonstrations are at their peak, Alex is wounded, separated from his father, and ends up taking refuge in a traditional Chinese home. Here he is cared for by two university students and their parents and grandparents. Because Alex has videotape footage of the massacre which will likely be some of the only evidence of the event, he hopes to try to smuggle these out of the country. One of the students, a teenage girl Alex's age named Xin-hua, decides to help Alex get to the safety of the airport where foreigners were being evacuated. Because it would seem odd for a Chinese girl to be associating with a Caucasian boy, she dyes his hair black, gives him Chinese clothes, and, on her bicycle, attempts to get him to safety. Enroute, they are stopped by the military and questioned, and when it is apparent that Alex is not Chinese, Xin-hua is interrogated on the spot, taken behind some trees and shot. Alex eventually finds his way to the airport, locates his father and, although he returns home safely, he finds his own perception of Canada to have become remarkably altered by his experiences in China.

In our reading group discussion of this novel, and in private conversations between Anna and myself,[59] it became apparent that this novel had particular significance for her. Although it seemed at first that this was because Anna and her husband had spent some time in China several years prior, I learned that, in fact, it was the bravery of the Chinese students that prompted a strong response from Anna:

> As I read and re-read this novel I came to realize how much we take our freedoms for granted, and how we sometimes fail to understand that we need to become personally responsible for maintaining them.

It was particularly significant that during the time that Anna was reading and teaching *Forbidden City*, there was a movement within her school system to eliminate the marking time for English teachers. Although Anna had previously described herself as relatively a-political, her reading of this novel, juxtaposed with this event, prompted unusual action:

> I kept having all these powerful personal responses to the book as I re-read it, because of all the stuff that is happening in our school district right now. I was at a meeting the other night where a teacher stood up and spoke about the need for us to join voices in order to offer some resistance to the controlling politics. It reminded me that we are not as free as we think we are, and that even in Canada we need to continually resist this kind of oppression. After that meeting, several English teachers and I from this school decided that we would prepare a presentation to our faculty, defending our need for marking time. We are also going to try to organize meetings with teachers from other schools. This is not something that I would usually do. My reading of *Forbidden City* has really affected me.

It is not surprising that Anna's actions should be affected by her reading of the book and, more particularly, through her reading of the book *with* her students. Thinking about their own need for "bigger worlds" seemed to illuminate this important idea for her. It is crucial to understand, however, that it was not her reading that sponsored her political actions, nor was it the political action that somehow altered the reading. Rather, these *co-emerged* with one another as Anna continued to maintain a viable relationship with her world — a world that included students, literary texts, and politicized action. As Maturana and Varela have suggested:

> We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist. Only when some interaction dislodges us — such as being suddenly located to a different cultural environment — and we reflect upon it, do we bring forth new constellations of relation that we explain by saying that we were not aware of them, or that we took them for granted.[60]

Although we may consider the interaction with a literary text imaginary, it is the conditioned imagination, as it co-exists with our other lived experiences that can serve as the interruption, the breach, the rupture in the familiar world. And it is this interruption, this newly configured set of relations that can help us to "see" (perceive) what has previously not been perceived. As the present world is viewed freshly, so too is the already-past world, for as hermeneutics reminds us, not only are we historically effected, but we effect history. Seeing freshly — differently — means understanding our past relations differently. It is an ever moving circle of understanding. A circle, one might argue, that becomes "bigger" when the literary imagination is invoked.

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[59] In addition to taking up *Forbidden City* and *The Chrysalids* in our reading group, I interviewed Anna and Ingrid several times. The interviews focused their personal response to the novels, their plans for teaching it, and their experience of teaching it.

[60] Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*, 242.

And so, it is not really surprising that as Anna became more involved in the "marking time issue," she became even more deeply involved in the re-reading of *Forbidden City* with her class. Although she had originally planned to alternate between reading chapters aloud to her students and having them read chapters on their own, she eventually chose, instead, to orally read the entire novel to them over a two week period. What can we say about this? We could say that Anna was denying her students their own experience of the novel. We could say that by reading aloud they were not being offered the opportunity to develop their own path of reading. We could say that reading to them effectively altered the reader-text power relations, placing the greatest authority for the map of reading in the teacher's hands.

On the other hand, we could say that by reading the novel orally with her students, Anna presented the possibility for an encounter with a text that many of them would never have by themselves. Not only would many not have read the book on their own, several simply could not read. We could also say that by reading the author's words out loud, Anna was standing with the author and her students in the evocation of the kind of meaning that occurs when persons gather together in the bringing forth of a world. And perhaps it was the publicly performed enunciation of the author's text that helped students to understand that literary texts are always embodied by the reader. Although the activity between reader and text is invisible, the "calling out" of the text by the teacher is a reminder that words require the resonating chamber of the body. Madeleine Grumet suggests that teachers must remember the intimate connection between bodies and words:

> Touch and voice are the sensual passages between parent and child. Because these modes of contact are associated with the intimacy of familial or erotic relations, they are barred from the classroom where sensuality in any form is anathema.[61]

And so, like the infant who, while lying against her mother's breast feels the resonance of the voice through the body, like the thrill of turning up music full-volume on the stereo so that the music, the voice, pierces the body, perhaps the teacher needs to use her own body as a chamber for the text. Perhaps by speaking the words in the presence of her students, the reading of the text becomes not just another task to be accomplished but an event of living — a performance — something that Albert Borgmann would call a focally real communal celebration:

> Focal realism, the starting point of communal celebration, is an antidote to fanaticism in itself. People who have been captivated by music make their children take lessons; they invite their neighbors and urge their friends to go to concerts. They will make music themselves .... In a community of celebration, the terms are defined by the reality being celebrated. When people join for Saturday morning softball games on Chicago's lakefront, they do not pretend to share their possessions or beliefs; they have gathered just to play.[62]

But the event of teachers reading *to* and *with* their students is not just any communal event. Although it may be compared to a softball game, the character of gathering together to participate in readings of literary texts is not just any playing. As Iser reminds us:

> [I]t is an integral feature of literature that ... it is not *created* for any one specific use .... In fact, literature seems constantly to provoke translations of itself into terms of prevailing social situations, which in turn makes it into a sort of divining rod for those impulses

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[61] Grumet, *Bitter Milk*, 141.

[62] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 141-143.

> that have given rise to whatever use has been attributed to it.[63]

If the literary text is a type of divining rod, then teachers who call out the text become part of this divining process. For, although the students may be situated in a public place, they can only perceive of the text what they are structurally able to perceive and, as such, the meanings they make can only emerge from the way in which the public event of reading exists in the *us/not-us*.

Madeleine Grumet has described this divining function as a form of "pointing to the world," suggesting that teachers who choose to read with their students "point" to some aspects of the world and not others. Like the parent who teaches the child by pointing (There's a doggy!), teachers who live and read with children identify that which may go unnoticed:

> When we select a story to read to a group of children, when we choose texts for a curriculum, we are extending this process of identifying what parts of the world, what relationships, creatures and events are worthy of their notice.[64]

But of course, as Grumet reminds us later, "The task of pointing out the world is dangerous. If we point to everything, we relinquish order."[65] What does it mean for a teacher to live with students during shared readings of texts? And how is the idea of "pointing to the world" particularly significant to this sort of dwelling together?

Towards the end of the school year, Anna and Ingrid invited me into their classrooms to observe some of the lessons which centered around shared readings with their students of *Forbidden City* and *The Chrysalids.* Unlike other research that I had done in classrooms, these observations had no specific pre-determined purposes. The three of us were simply interested in the question of what it was like to share readings of literary texts with our students as these readings became part of the high school English curriculum. And so, although I did ask Anna and Ingrid to wear a portable tape recorder, and although I did bring along a notepad, and although I was introduced as a "person from the university" to the students, I was not really entirely sure what I was looking for or what I would find. One could say that we agreed to allow the "path" of these classroom visits to "be laid down while walking."

It was significant, however, that unlike previous research that I had done with teachers whom I barely knew, this classroom intervention was accomplished with persons with whom I had read — with persons whom I had engaged in mutual "world pointing" — and so, more than that at any other time, I felt that Ingrid, Anna and I — collectively — were bringing forth a very particular world of significance that had been made possible through our discussions of literary texts. Like the collective at the villa, we agreed that our history of interactions with each other through reading together had enabled us to notice a world of significance that we had not noticed before.

And so, as I sat in Anna's classroom one unseasonably warm Spring day, with the breeze from the window flipping the pages of my notepad, I was again reminded that my function in this classroom was not to "report" on Anna's or her students' activities, nor was it to attempt to distinguish between effective and ineffective routines, processes, or practices. Rather, it was to situate myself, as another reader who was also a teacher, in this group of persons who were reading together in order to come to some understanding of what it means for teachers and students to engage in this activity in schools. More specifically, it was to try to understand the deep relationship between the teacher's life, the way her own reading of literary texts became part of the historical effect which constitutes each lived moment, and the way in which this is enacted in these shared readings. Although this important insight eventually led to the sort of thinking and reading which led to a great deal of the writing in preceding chapters, it is not the insight — nor was it the pleasant warmness of the Spring day — which has etched this particular classroom visit in my memory. Rather, it was a small incident — a hap, we could say — that most clearly announced for me the importance of pointing.

As she had done for several days prior, Anna was engaged in reading aloud *Forbidden City* to this class of twenty-six grade eleven students. I had been quite enjoying these classes, for Anna did not simply read aloud an entire chapter from beginning to end and then question her students or engage them in discussion. Instead, she would stop her reading every now and again and engage in what I called "pointing to herself." She would ask questions like, "I wonder why Alex did that?" "Could it be that he really cares about Xin-hua?" And sometimes she would answer them. "I get the feeling that he is really changing, and I like these changes; it makes him seem more human to me!" Sometimes she talked about her experience of visiting China, her feelings about the difficult political situation, her wondering about the kinds of freedom that she most valued in Canada. On this day, in the middle of her reading, she stopped to tell students that she had thought about *Forbidden City* during the teacher meeting she was at the previous night, and had been reminded of the importance of standing up for what one believes is right and just. And she asked students if they were thinking about their own lives differently by being immersed in this book.

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[63] Iser, *Prospecting*, 208.

[64] Madeleine Grumet, "Lost Places, Potential Spaces and Possible Worlds: Why We Read Books With Other People," *Margins, 1,* (Spring, 1991), 40.

[65] Ibid.

As I spent days in Anna's class being immersed in this event we call reading with our students, I realized that, although one could easily list the "techniques" that were contributing to the attention students were giving this text, these could somehow not account for the difference between this particular event and others I had witnessed. Students who had originally shown distaste for this novel were engaged. Attendance was almost one hundred percent (even on this warm Spring day). As I continued to think about this, Anna continued her reading, slowly moving around the classroom, stopping periodically to think out loud. And during this choreography of movement and recitation, she steered over to the back corner of the room where Kathy and Jamal had begun a whispering session. Without comment, she slipped herself between them, all the while continuing her reading. Jamal immediately tried to find his place in the text; Anna (still reading) placed her finger on his book at right spot. Kathy did not attend to her text, but looked at Anna, and asked, "Mrs. Pilecki, why do you always tuck yourself in like that?" Somewhat startled, Anna stopped reading, smiled, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "I guess I do that quite a lot, don't I?"

Yes she did. Anna did tuck herself into the classes she taught. Completely. Anna did not "tour" through her classes. She did not tour through her reading. Reading, for Anna, was a commitment which she took very seriously and, as evidenced by her attentiveness to *The English Patient*, it was a commitment that emerged from her desire to dwell in life, not tour through it. And so, it is not surprising that, when Anna brought forward *Forbidden City* for her students, she brought forward, as fully and deeply as she was able, her own relationship with that novel. Not just a relationship which had been established prior to the school day, but a relationship that unfolded and developed *with* Anna and her students during the event of curriculum. As Anna read each word of the text, as her body became the chamber through which the words resonated, she *showed* her students the way that literary texts course through a body. And as she stopped and pointed to the text, to her reading of the text, to her past and present living in and through a life that contained this literary text, she created a location — a commonplace for interpretation — of the event of curriculum that was being enacted on that day.

And so, when she read the words that announced Xin-hua's murder by the Chinese soldiers, her students understood why there was a small tremor in her voice, a hesitation in her reading. For they knew that this was not just any reading of any text; they understood that this was an event of dwelling with Anna in a transformative moment of curriculum. A moment in which, because Anna was fully invested in her shared reading, so too were they. This is not simply because of the power of the literary text, nor is it the power of the teacher. Rather, it is what happens when the teacher is able to show her students what it is like to commit oneself to relationship with a world which is made somewhat larger, somewhat more "strange," because of the conditioned imagination. Tucking-in is what Heidegger has called *Building Dwelling Thinking*. It is like the location announced by the bridge:

> With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows.[66]

When the literary text is brought into the school classroom and the literary imagination is invoked, it is important to understand that it is not the text that does the gathering, it is the teacher who dwells.

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[66] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p. 340.

Occasioning

> It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being.[67]
>
> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*

> Some of my students don't know what it means to be hated. I think that they need to know. This book will give them that experience.
>
> Ingrid

The school curriculum does not and cannot exist apart from the world of which it is a component. Curriculum action, then, like any action, becomes part of continuous structural coupling between curriculum actors and their world. For Ingrid, choosing to read the novel *The Chrysalids* with her academic stream grade ten students was largely a response to the increasing racial tension in the inner-city high school where she taught. Ingrid was concerned that these escalating tensions were not being addressed as effectively as they could be across the school curriculum. At the same time, she was becoming increasingly frightened by the way in which this climate at school was being supported by public displays of the racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes of the provincial Premier and other prominent elected officials. For Ingrid, who had experienced a great deal of persecution in her life, the kind of intolerance and hatred being expressed in the community and the school was simply unbearable:

> I grew up in a neighborhood where being overweight and Jewish meant that I was continually teased, harassed and excluded. Well, I'm still overweight and still Jewish and I know what it's like to be hated for having certain beliefs and a certain kind of body....But if I've had a hard time in life, it's been even more difficult for my cousin who is gay. He's been the victim of some horrible acts of hatred....That's why when I hear the premier of our province and other politicians using their position to publicize their own racism and homophobia I become very angry.

And so, because her own reading of *The Chrysalids* had evoked a particularly powerful emotional response, Ingrid decided that she would use it as the focal point of what she came to call her "anti-hatred" unit.

As mentioned earlier, because she wanted students to have their "own experience" of the novel, she asked, at the beginning of the unit, that they spend one week reading on their own. It is important to understand that this decision was largely the result of Ingrid's experiences in the reading group, particularly her experience of reading *The English Patient:*

> Although I found *The English Patient* difficult and frustrating, it was important for me to have my own relationship with the book. I don't usually let my students have that kind of experience. Usually, because I want them to learn particular things from their reading, I carefully guide them through the reading with questions and discussion.

Written in 1955, *The Chrysalids* is a science fiction novel set within a community called Waknuk in which any kind of deviation from the norm is rooted out and destroyed. The narrator and main character is David who can communicate telepathically with a small group of other young people in the community. Because this deviation is invisible, it goes unnoticed for many years, until one of their group, Anne, withdraws herself and, in a desperate attempt to be "normal," marries a non-telepathic man from the community. Soon after, David and his friends' secret is disclosed by Anne to her husband and, eventually to others in the community. At the same time, Petra, David's sister whose telepathic powers are much stronger than the others', has been sending and receiving messages from the "Sealand" people who, it turns out, are an entire civilization able to communicate telepathically. In the end, drawn by Petra's great power, the Sealand people arrive in Waknuk, kill a number of the oppressors who aim to dispose of David and his friends, and return to Sealand with Petra and several others.

In our reading group discussion of this novel, we all agreed that the themes of oppression were anything but subtle. Although the story in itself was engaging, it was obvious that the reader was being placed within a textual structure that was meant to evoke feelings of what it would be like to be despised for non-conformity. Barthes would call this a "readerly" text,[68] while Iser would likely suggest that although it required some suspension of disbelief, it had fewer "gaps and spaces" than most contemporary novels. Unlike *The English Patient* which requires that the reader work diligently to make connections between elements of the text, *The Chrysalids* presents a tightly bound set of circumstances. Therefore, we believed that Ingrid was correct in believing that her students would gain a deeper understanding of issues of racism and hatred in their own world by reading the novel.

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[67] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9.

We were wrong. Although most of the students completed their reading of the novel in the required week, it became clear to both Ingrid and myself that the intended experience had not evolved for most students. Unlike ourselves, most of them did not articulate the kind of emotional response to the text that we had expected. In fact, most students suggested that the book was rather dull and slow-moving. Although their written personal responses indicated that they *understood* the issues presented, it seemed that they were unable to make the connection between the text and their lives. Marla's response was typical:

> I found the book quite boring and hard to get into. Nothing happened for a long time. It got interesting when we found out about Sophie's six toes, and then a bit at the end when the Sealand people came, but that's about all.

When asked if she thought that the kind of oppression depicted in the book happened in the school or in the city she suggested:

> Not really. I mean, yeah, there's kids that get bugged in the school for different things — like if they're overweight or something — but nothing really bad. I think we all get along really well here in this school.

Ingrid became quite depressed. How could a novel which had provoked so powerful a response in her, seemingly do so little for her students?

> I don't understand what's going on here. Most of these students just don't seem to *feel* the way that I feel about this book. Or the way that most of us in the reading group felt about it. There isn't the same kind of emotional reaction. They don't seem to be having the experience that I thought they would have.

However, there were several students who did have this experience. Alvina, a Chinese Canadian student, told me:

> I became really involved in the book. I couldn't put it down. I was quite upset when Sophie was killed.

For Alvina, the book mirrored her, and some of her friends' experience of attending this large, predominantly Caucasian high school:

> In this school you have to be white and good looking to be popular. If you're a girl you need to have a boyfriend who is on the basketball or football team. ...I don't have many friends here.

We do not see what we do not see. While the experience of reading *The Chrysalids* had illuminated Alvina's situation for her, it had not helped Marla or many of her classmates "see" any more in their world than they had seen before. Although the literary imagination had been invoked to a certain degree, it had not significantly changed their perception of their world. What could account for the difference between Ingrid's experience of reading and the experience of many of her students?

Like most skilled readers, during the course of her reading life, Ingrid had experienced the transformative effects of her engagement with literary texts. For her, books like *The English Patient* announced a location — a commonplace for interpretation — within which she was able to engage in a period of reflective meditation on her circumstances in the world. Hermeneutics and literary reception theory, however, have taught us that these experiences, although different from those which do not include the literary text, always emerge from historically effected structures. Not only is this governed by our history of personal experiences in the world, but, as suggested in chapter four, these very experiences are inextricably connected to our biological history as a species on this planet. Any interactions which we have in the world, then, are, as Maturana suggests, always structure determined:

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[68] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. For Barthes, the writerly text is a plural text, so open as to yield an infinite number of interpretations. It is called "writerly" because it is more able to be re-written with every reading. This is the opposite of the "readerly" text which is much more closed, much tighter, much more didactic than its counterpart, the writerly text.

> Living systems, if they are to be explainable, must be treated as structure-determined systems, defined by certain organizations. Hence they must be systems in which whatever happens to them is determined in them by their structure. The interactions they undergo will only trigger changes in them; they will not specify what happens to them.[69]

Now, this is not a popular view of reading or learning, for it flies in the face of the sort of freedom, self-control, and self-determination that we, as modern subjects, would like to believe that we have. It is important to understand, however, that Maturana is not suggesting that the living system we call a human being does not have choices, or that varieties of paths of interaction are not possible. He is merely suggesting the obvious: that our very historically effected structures (phenomenological and biological) determine what sorts of interactions in the world are possible. This does not mean that our paths in life are *pre*-determined, for while we are structure-determined, so too is the medium with which we must maintain a viable relationship — which, as explained in chapter four, I call *us/not-us*. Therefore, just as we are structure-determined, so too is our medium (environment), and so it too is only capable of admitting changes which are structurally possible. Because these interactions are constant, it is impossible to trace their beginnings and endings, and so questions of cause and effect are uninteresting and unproductive. When discussing any sort of us/not-us interaction, the idea of *correspondence* gives way to the importance of *coherence* for it is only by maintaining coherence among us/not-us that continued action (structural coupling) is possible. Hermeneutically speaking, we would call this the circle of understanding, where our prejudices are always the backdrop for our ongoing action in the world, but, at the same time, become altered — re-written — as new information is added to the system.

Any event of living, including living which includes the experience of reading the literary text is not syncretic, but recursive. When this is understood, it becomes rather clear that, although a literary text can offer an opportunity for a particular experience, it cannot *cause* the experience to happen in the reader. The reader can only admit a response that is structurally possible. Therefore, given their prior histories of experience, it is not surprising that Ingrid and Alvina were emotionally moved by *The Chrysalids* while Marla, Donna and Jason were not. Simply being able to *de-code* the words in the text did not guarantee the same experience.

What implications does this have for the school curriculum, particularly situations where the *aesthetic* rather than *efferent* experience with the literary text is meant to contribute to the path of curriculum? This is an important question, for although we understand that the literary text is meant to invoke the literary imagination, conventional school practices suggest that it is the *efferent* rather than the *aesthetic* reading that is valued in the secondary English classroom. That is why it is not really necessary that Ingrid's students leave their reading experience with anything other than an ability to know what happened, be able to name particular literary conventions in the text, and be able to discuss these in relation to their own opinions. None of these require that they have "felt" or "experienced" what it was like to be hated through their reading of the book. Essentially, none of what is typically asked a secondary English student (including journal responses) really requires that they have any deep and enduring relationship with the text— a relationship such as Ingrid and the rest of us experienced in our reading of *The English Patient*.

Through the various written and oral responses given by students in class, as well as from interviews which I had with students who volunteered to talk to me about their experience with this reading,[70] it became rather clear that students who admitted to having experienced discrimination (particularly racial) in their lives had a powerful emotional response to the novel, while those who told me that they had not experienced discrimination did not have the same sort of response. Therefore, the very persons whom Ingrid hoped to affect with this novel were not affected. Their historically effected structures, it seems, simply could not admit this new experience.

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[69] Humberto Maturana, "Everything is Said by an Observer," in *Gaia, A Way of Knowing: Political Implications of the New Biology*, ed. William I. Thompson (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), 73-74.

[70] Twelve out of twenty-five students agreed to be interviewed about their experience of reading the novel and the other activities which made up the unit. Each interview was between 25-40 minutes in length.

It is important to understand, however, that like any literary text, this one did not stand alone in its relationship to its readers. Like all things in the world, it existed as part of the world with which students needed to remain viable. And because this reading was only a part of Ingrid's "anti-hatred" unit, it existed alongside other experiences she presented to them, including the viewing of films, the reading of non-literary material on the subject of racism and hatred, and presentations from two guest speakers — Dayna, from the Jewish Federation and Tony, from the city's gay and lesbian association. Therefore, as I interviewed students about their experience of reading *The Chrysalids,* I was also interested in the larger text of curriculum in which this reading existed and of the relationship between these components of not-us that comprised the world of the classroom for these students. This meant that my questions about their experience of reading the novel were always positioned next to questions about their impressions of other aspects of the unit, particularly their impressions of what the guest speakers had to say about what it was like being a member of a marginalized group.

It was this approach which, within the context of a discussion with fifteen year old Carl, helped me to understand the importance of *occasioning.* Occasioning was a word that I had heard mathematics education researcher Thomas Kieren use when discussing the idea of cognition as embodied action in relation to teaching experiments he had done with public school and university mathematics students. Professor Kieren was known to say things like "The teacher must occasion learning with the students."[71] Although I had always sensed the importance of what he was saying, I could never quite make sense of this unusual use of occasion. What is the significance between this shift from the noun form of occasion to the verb?

We tend to think of "occasion" as some sort of special event or celebration, such as a birthday, a wedding anniversary, Christmas, Hannukah, or a graduation. When the word "occasion" is used to describe classroom events, it is often thought of in such terms. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear of classroom occasions as "celebrating students' learning." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* however, the original Latin meaning of occasion *(occasion-em)* has more to do with an opportunity arising from a "falling of things towards each other"; it is something that presents itself in the middle of a set of circumstances. Occasion, understood in this way, is more like a hap — more like the kind of situation that is not predictable but which, if taken up, can lead to a new and previously unknown path of understanding. The move from noun to verb, from occasion to occasioning, when applied to a discussion of curriculum, is similar to the move from curriculum to currere. The teacher *occasions* when she is able to notice a moment that occurs when aspects of curriculum have "fallen together" in unexpected, but interesting ways. With her students, she is able to lay a path of understanding that was previously unknown.

Like most others in Ingrid's class, Carl had shown little interest in *The Chrysalids.* Although his written responses indicated that he had read it, and could discuss elements of the novel (character, theme, etc), his response to Ingrid's announcement that a member of the gay and lesbian community would be coming to speak to the class indicated that, if he had experienced what it was like to be hated by reading the novel, he was not generalizing this to his life, for as he left class that day I heard him mutter to himself, "I'm not coming to class it there's gonna be a fag in here!" However, Carl did come to class on that day. And although he, like many of the other students in the class entered the classroom hesitantly and sat back in his seat, arms folded — rigid, resistant, recalcitrant — like several others, he became visibly more alert as Tony spoke. And towards the end of the period when Tony asked if there were questions, Carl was among the first to raise his hand: "Did you ever play hockey or football when you were a kid? Do gay people do that?"

During our interview I asked Carl about his experience of reading *The Chrysalids:*

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[71] It was Professor Kieren who, during a graduate course he was teaching entitled *Cognition and Curriculum* introduced me to the work of Maturana and Varela (*The Tree of Knowledge)* and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch *(The Embodied Mind).* Obviously, it has been influential in this work. In addition, many conversations between Professor Kieren and myself (usually in the hallway by the elevators!) helped me to develop my understanding of an "enactivist" approach to cognition and curriculum theorizing.

> I just couldn't get into this book. And it took me forever to write about anything about it—mainly because nothing stuck in my head. I had to read things over and over again — but nothing seemed to stick.

Nothing seemed to stick. Even re-reading did not seem to help. Clearly, re-reading is no guarantee that dwelling has occurred. Nor is desire to know, for it was apparent from my discussions with Carl that he wanted to understand the issues which seemed to be so important to Ingrid:

> I knew that there was something about the book that was really important to Mrs. Matisz—something that we were supposed to get. But I just couldn't get it from reading the book.

But of course a relationship with a text is always part of a relationship with *not us*, and so I was not surprised when Carl told me that what he had previously not "seen" in the novel he could after listening to Tony speak:

> I didn't really catch on to the book until after Tony had spoken to us. It was weird—like, I was able to understand what the book was saying after listening to him talk to us about what it was like to be gay. When I think of the book now, I think of some of the things that Tony said and how, all of a sudden, I understood what life was like for him — how difficult it was.

Ingrid knew that the presentations from Dayna and Tony had had an effect on her students. She could tell by the way in which they had become engaged in class, by their attention; by their questions, by the way in which they came into class on the days following the presentations. Occasioning had begun. However, in order for occasioning to fully develop, there needed to be time for re-collection, re-vision, re-reading. And so, following the occasions of curriculum which featured readings of a literary text and the extra-textual occasions featuring the guest speakers, there were class discussions of issues which emerged from these events. What was life like for the characters who were banished to the fringes? What would it be like to grow up as a visible minority? An invisible minority? Why is it so difficult for us to understand the way in which we are implicated in the architecture of hatred in our society? Could it be that as structure-determined creatures we simply "cannot see what we cannot see?"

Varela uses the analogy of wind chimes to illustrate what it means to be structure determined:

> Imagine in your mind's eye and ear a mobile, with thin pieces of glass dangling like leaves off branches, and so on. Any gust of wind will cause the mobile to tinkle, the whole structure changing its speed, torsion of branches, etc. Clearly, how the mobile sounds is not determined or instructed by the wind or the gentle push we may give it. The way it sounds has more to do with the kinds of structural configurations it has when it receives a perturbation or imbalance. Every mobile will have a typical melody and tone proper to its constitution. In other words, it is obvious from this example that in order to understand the sound patterns we hear, we turn to the nature of the chimes and not to the wind that hits them.[72]

But of course, although the chimes have only a "possible" range of sounds, the intensity of the perturbation — the wind — will determine the intensity of the sound, and, if we take the metaphor a little further, will determine whether or not the glass will be able to sustain the force or whether the force will shatter them. In any case, although the structure is in place, it requires some disturbance, some occasion of wind to effect a sound. A limitation of this metaphor, of course, is that although the thin pieces of glass are shown to move according to their possibilities on the occasion of the wind, the way in which the history of interactions with wind eventually changes not only the path of movement, but the very structure of that which is occasioned is not taken into account. Suzanne Langer's use of the relationship between form and motion in the waterfall is perhaps a truer depiction of the ideas of structure determination, coupling and occasioning:

> The waterfall has a shape, moving somewhat, its long streamers seeming to shift like ribbons in a wind, but its mobile shape is a permanent datum in the landscape, among rocks and trees and other things. Yet the water does not really ever stand before us. Scarcely a

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[72] Varela, "Laying Down a Path in Walking," 50.

> drop stays there for the length of one glance. The material composition of the waterfall changes all the time; only the form is permanent; and what gives any shape at all to the water is the motion. The waterfall exhibits a *form of motion*, or a *dynamic form.*[73]

Suggesting that "the material composition of the waterfall changes all the time" depicts the way in which two structurally determined unities (water and environment) can only function within the range of their mutual possibilities, but from this each co-emerges somewhat differently from their history of occasioning with one another.

But what occasions the waterfall and what does the waterfall occasion? Melting snow from distant mountains, run off from August thunderstorms, the very structure of the land, the very *history of previous occasionings* which have cut a path (not *the* path, but *one* path from a possible many that may have been cut). The interesting question becomes one of what constitutes the waterfall. Is it the water? The riverbed through which the water passes? The conditions of water collection that lead to the forming of a river that eventually flows over a cliff? All of these, it seems. The various occasionings which lead to the maintenance of the dynamic form which we call the waterfall happen *allatonce*. And even if the water supply ends, there remains evidence of motion, for cut into the rock of the riverbed is the history of the water's effect. Something like scars from childhood cuts, stretch marks from childbearing, notes in the margins of a book.

What is the significance of the idea of occasioning, of the structure-determined action of wind chimes, and the dynamic form of the waterfall to curriculum? Madeleine Grumet provides a possible synthesis:

> Curriculum is a moving form. That is why we have trouble capturing it, fixing it in language, lodging it in our matrix. Whether we talk about it as history, as syllabi, as classroom discourse, as intended learning outcomes, or as experience, we are trying to grasp a moving form, to catch it at the moment that it slides from being the figure, the object and goal of action, and collapses into the ground of action.[74]

It is difficult to discuss moving form, since it is the nature of language to freeze, to fix, to isolate, and to present one-word-after-the-other a stream of some interpretation of a world. Activities in the classroom are often like that. First we prepare to read by talking about the author and the historical circumstances of the text; then we read; we respond; we answer questions about our reading; we discuss our reading; we write about it. One-thing-after-the-other. This in itself is not problematic, for it is really the way life is. What *is* problematic is pretending that learning experiences are linear, incremental and cumulative. And it is here that even the waterfall metaphor breaks down, for unlike the waterfall which cannot help but flow downstream collecting into rivers, lakes and the ocean in an ever-forward-flowing stream, humans have the ability to back-up, and through the process of reflection re-configure their structures — change their mind and change their direction. Curriculum is a moving form, but unlike the waterfall, it moves forward and backward — sometimes allatonce.

What does this suggest about Carl's experience in the curriculum announced by the various experiences surrounding his reading of *The Chrysalids?* First of all, it is rather clear that the readings of literary texts will not, as Ingrid expected "give" students like Carl an experience which falls outside the realm of their structure determined possibilities. Some paths are simply not possible, even with the assistance of the literary imagination. However, it is equally important to understand that reading does not necessarily end upon the completion of the physical act of reading. Reading can re-occur as new events unfold within the dynamic form of curriculum, particularly if the teacher understands that students' engagements with literary texts are structure dependent. As a consequence the teacher does not insist upon *optimal* readings of these texts, but instead merely expects *sufficient* readings. Carl's reading was sufficient. He knew enough about the text to be able to talk and write about it. And it is from the point of sufficiency of the reading (the "good enough reading") that the teacher who understands the importance of occasioning begins to present events which allow many paths of learning to unfold. The text and the extra-textual activities are not boundaries which confine, but rather are processes of occasioning which unfold into new understanding.

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[73] Langer, *Problems of Art,* 48, original italics.

[74] Grumet, *Bitter Milk,* 172.

Specifically, this means understanding that events such as the guest speaker's presentations, which occurred after the event of reading, when subject to a deliberate period of reflection, have the capacity — post hoc — to affect the way in which the literary imagination is invoked and conditioned. Although Carl did not re-read *The Chrysalids* after hearing from Tony, the opportunity to re-collect the details of reading in relation to a reading self that had been involved in this curriculum occasioning allowed Carl a deeper, richer interpretation of the text. This is an important point to those of us who believe that new worlds can be opened up for students when the literary imagination is invoked by in-class readings of the literary text, for it shows how we must neither ignore nor feel powerless by the fact that relationships with literary texts are always structure determined. For although the initial reading of the text is always conditioned by the reader's existing structure, the history of interactions between that reading and critical reflections on it can offer clearings for new paths of understanding. This is the power of reading and dwelling together with our students.

Hijacking

> Mr. Sweeney was a completely lazy man. I don't remember him reading at his desk, grading papers, or even looking at us. He just sat there for the entire semester, like a middle aged mannikin. Though the authors we read were good choices, our sixteen-year-old minds had trouble understanding those short stories without the help of a teacher. But it was nice for an hour in the school day just to be left alone and I remember that.
>
> Natalie Goldberg, *Long Quiet Highway*[75]

> But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense but to look for the truth in others.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[76]

In his book *Becoming a Reader,* J.A. Appleyard suggests there are important differences between the adolescent's and the adult's experiences of reading literary texts.[77] Most adults, he explains, read literary texts in order to escape from the pressures of daily life, to search for wisdom or truth, and/or to find usable images that help them negotiate their lives in a more productive and satisfying manner. Generally speaking, the adult reader can be described as pragmatic, for although the text is experienced aesthetically, most adult readers expect some real-world, non-imaginary benefit. The adolescent reader, according to Appleyard, generally expects to be able to identify with the main characters, and even if they are contained in science fiction or fantasy settings, expects them to be realistic. Most important, however, is that they expect their engagement with the literary text to make them think about various competing truths in their own lives. Unlike adults who generally use their experience with literary texts to reflect on the already-walked path of their lives, adolescents are more concerned with using their relationship with the text to make immediate decisions and to project a path of possibility.

The experiences shared by members of our teacher reading group, along with my interviews with twenty-five high school students from Anna's and Ingrid's classes, largely confirm Appleyard's general conclusions about these different reading experiences. Whether the purpose for reading is the search for wisdom and truth, or the search for a future path for living, most adolescent and adult readers who read outside of school contexts choose to do so in order to deepen their understanding of their lived situation, even if this entails merely escaping from that condition for a time through the act of reading. As I spoke to adolescent readers about their experience of reading *The Chrysalids* and *Forbidden City*, it became clear that, for a number of them, their relationship with the text had become an important referential experience — a reference text, in itself, so to speak. Kevin, for example, confided that he had not really expected to "get into" the book, but was unexpectedly swept in when the character Sophie's six toes are announced to the reader:

> I couldn't believe it when I read that. I've never told anyone at school this, but I had six toes on each foot when I was born, and had to have them cut off. It didn't really bother me all that much

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[75] Goldberg, *Long Quiet Highway: Waking Up in America,* 17.

[76] Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* 117.

[77] J.A. Appleyard, *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction From Childhood to Adulthood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

> until reading this book — because look what happened to Sophie! I guess I never thought that something like that would be thought of as a deviation. I sort of felt like a freak when I read that.

Although he had become highly engaged in the novel, it was not a comfortable engagement, because it caused Kevin to wonder about his status as a "normal" person. And in high school where conformity is highly desired, feelings of abnormality can be distressing.

Malcolm, who had emigrated with his family from Northern Ireland five years prior, also felt considerable discomfort:

> When I read about the way the deviations were handled in the book I remembered how people always noticed my accent.

I had not noticed an accent, and told him so.

> I've worked hard to suppress it. I don't want to sound different. I hated having attention drawn to myself all the time.

Taylor's description of his feelings about *Forbidden City* showed how strong the relationship between the reader's current experience and a literary text could be:

> Most of the kids think that all Indians do is get drunk and hang out on 97th Street. When I listened to Mrs. Pilecki read the book I thought about how my family was sort of like the Chinese families.

There are two issues which emerge from these readers' comments. First is the fact that many of the "responses" which are reported in the English classroom are, in themselves, fictives. Students like Kevin and Malcolm, whose entire relationship with a book seemed to hinge on particular life experience that they wished to remain private, felt tremendous dissonance between their actual experience of reading and that which was reported (in written or oral form) in class. Excluding these relational pivot points, for them, meant needing to "construct" responses in order to fulfill curricular expectations. Second is the ethical issue of the appropriateness of using students' relationships with texts as material for the curriculum. Although is it significant, and likely important, that Taylor is able to better understand the relationship between First Nations persons and others as a result of his reading a novel, it does not follow that this experience should be used as a classroom text.

John Elliott has used the term "hijacking" to describe the way in which university-based researchers have appropriated the experience of practising teachers and used them for their own benefit:

> We take an idea which underpins teachers' practices, distort it through translation into academic jargon, and thereby 'hijack' it from its practical context and the web of interlocking ideas which operate within that context.[78]

Are teachers hijacking student response by making response to literary texts a requirement in the English classroom? What really functions as the text of curriculum in the secondary English classroom? Is it the literary text? Or is it that which is inextricably attached to the texts?

Before these questions can be addressed, it is important to understand that English as a school subject is a fairly recent phenomenon. For most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English language arts found their way into the curriculum through subjects like spelling, grammar, rhetoric, literary history, reading, oratory, and elocution.[79] Literary texts were generally used as materials through which skills and cultural heritage were taught. The push towards universal public education and concurrent importance ascribed to the reading of religious materials and classical texts eventually led to greater use of particular literary texts in schools. However, again, these had specific purposes: to engender in students moral virtues and an appreciation of literary works of art. It is not surprising then, that even to this day, the literary text functions as a vehicle for transmission of cultural heritage, for moral education, social reproduction, and skills instruction.

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[78] Elliott, *Action Research for Educational Change* , 14.

[79] For an excellent overview of the history of English teaching see Arthur Applebee and Alan Purves, "Literature and the Language Arts," in *Handbook of Research in Curriculum*, ed. Philip W. Jackson (New York: MacMillan, 1992).

The popularity of "personal response" to literature in the English classroom, although sporadically practiced for the last sixty years or so,[80] has only gained general popularity in the past two decades. The importance of personal response, it seems, has coincided with considerable research on reading which has convincingly shown the importance of the reader's response to meaning making, the push towards student centered instruction in schools, and the general Western cultural belief in the importance of individualism and ownership. Not only has personal response been seen as vital to the enactment of the literary text, it has been understood as a personal right to be supported and maintained in the school curriculum. These beliefs, however, when asked to co-exist with the sorting and ranking functions of schools (where right answers are important), requires that the reader-text relation (another way of talking about response) become an artifact of curriculum which must become subject to the gaze of the teacher — for of course, it is the teacher who ultimately must assess the individual worth and merit of each student's learning. When the evaluative gaze of the English teacher is considered in light of the previous chapters, which have shown the way in which the reader's (student's) relationship is *always* part of the not-us world with which he or she is coupled, it becomes rather clear that evaluation has become a rather dangerous form of *panopticism.*

Panopticism, as discussed by Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish*,[81] a history of the prison system — is derived from the word "Panopticon" — a plan for an efficient prison designed by Jeremy Bentham and described in his book *Panopticon*, published in 1791. The panopticon's most innovative feature was a design which allowed the warden constant surveillance of the prisoners from a vantage point in a tower surrounded by cells for individuals. These cells, because they were fully open in the front (bars only), and lit from behind, exposed prisoners at all times. Foucault writes:

> They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately.[82]

The idea of the panopticon, Foucault suggests, has polyvalent applications:

> It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons.[83]

The English patient, of course, experiences panopticism in various ways. As a patient, unable to care for his own needs, he is continually exposed to the ministrations of others. At the same time, his very elusiveness about his identity coupled with the intriguing bits of it which are revealed through his commonplace book prove irresistible to Caravaggio who is determined to excavate the truth of his past. There are times, however, when the constant surveillance is simply too much to bear:

> You must talk to me, Caravaggio. Or am I just a book? Something to be read, some creature to be tempted out of a loch and shot full of morphine, full of corridors, lies, loose vegetation, pockets of stones.[84]

And there were times when members of the reading group felt the panoptic gaze. Ingrid commented on this:

> I remember coming to the reading group after having missed one session. All of a sudden everybody had these little notes. And I thought, "Ah, everybody's keeping notes! I should keep notes too."

As discussed in chapter five, the need to publicly demonstrate dedication to reading, along with the knowledge that private reading relationships were to become the subject of conversation, was stressful for most group members. And although it was also productive, it is important to remember that each of us ultimately *chose* to be involved in that shared reading situation — and, could also choose to opt out. Like prisoners in the cells of the Panopticon, however, the students in the English classroom often do not have an opportunity to freely move out of the panoptic gaze. And, of course, in schools, panopticism is heightened, for unlike the prisoners in the panoptic prison who are not able to see one another, the students are continually subject to the gaze of their peers. As sixteen year old Darren remarked:

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[80] I.A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* was one of the first texts of literary theory to address the importance of the reader's response to a literary work.

[81] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[82] Ibid., 200.

[83] Ibid., 205.

[84] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 253.

> High school is hell. Most adults forget how awful it really is. There is no place to hide. If it's not the teachers watching you, it's all the other kids.

It became clear that for many of Ingrid's and Anna's students, prior experiences in English language arts classes had taught them to grow leery of anything related to "journals" or "personal response." For they had learned that "personal response" was simply another way of checking to see whether or not they had read the book and, if they had, how well they had understood it. For some students this seemed like an inefficient way to check on them. Tim suggested:

> It would have been a lot easier if my grade nine teacher had just given us questions at the end of each chapter like all the other teachers I had. Cause that's all he was really interested in anyway — whether we had read the book.

For many others, however, whether it was in the form of a response journal or occasional response assignments, the need to respond personally was often distasteful — sometimes impossible. Not only did students feel unable and unwilling to share with their teacher the direction their literary imagination had taken them, they often found it quite impossible to do so when surrounded by their peers in the school classroom. This should not be surprising. For as Iser has suggested, "the act of fictionalizing is a crossing of boundaries. It amounts to nothing short of an act of transgression."[85] Students who are unaccustomed to being visible at all times in the school classroom cannot and should not be expected to participate in this coerced disclosure. Darby was most articulate on this subject:

> I just couldn't write very much about *The Chrysalids.* And it wasn't because I didn't have anything to write about. It's just that even before Tony came in to talk to us, I had thought about how gays and lesbians are discriminated against, because I have friends who are gay and lesbian. But I couldn't write about *that.* Mrs. Matisz doesn't know I have these friends, and no-one in the class does either. So I just pretended that I didn't like the book.

When one is constantly exposed, there is a desperate desire to cover up. To become hidden, invisible, not there. It's easy to be not-there when working on a grammar unit, a spelling list, a set of questions about who said and did what in act three, scene five of Hamlet. It's hard to become not-there when asked to uncover a relationship that has been formed with a literary text. Now, there are those who might say, "Well, students don't have to respond. It is their choice." I wonder if it is. Do students really believe that saying nothing will not affect their grades? Others might suggest that personal response can be kept personal, since what is often graded is the "expository" material that is written anyway. But if we understand reading as embodied action, we must also understand that there are no real boundaries between what we call "personal" and what we call "public."

When the reader establishes a relationship with a literary work of art, when the literary imagination is invoked, the response is not fragmented. Although readers may choose what to disclose and what not to disclose, it is important to remember that what is *not* chosen — what is absent — is always present. And so, when Kevin did not mention the fact that he also at one time had had six toes, when Malcolm felt uneasy because the book reminded him that he too was "different," when Darby pretended she had not liked the book because she was not able to "construct" a fitting fictive response to the classroom text, an event of curriculum was unfolding that served to reinforce the authority of the teacher as the primary arbiter of what is said and not said in the English classroom. For although there are some students who are able to integrate their relationship with a literary text into the school curriculum, there seem to be many who are not. This means that the literary imagination is not really able to do its job in the school classroom. The panoptic stare has glued some readers in place.

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[85] Iser, *The Real, The Fictive, The Imaginary,* 3.

> I've read all four volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* twice....I hate reading novels for school though. I can't enjoy a book when I know that I have to answer questions or say something about it in class.
>
> Greg, *grade 11*

> Reading in school is not the same as reading at home. At home you can control your relationship with the book. At school you can't.
>
> Ingrid

> When I was growing up and going to school, reading really was a private thing. We wrote about our reading—in the form of essays—but we never did any personal response. I guess I'm still not used to it.
>
> Mena

For some students and teachers the question of what the literary imagination has done for the school curriculum is not nearly as important or as interesting as what the curriculum has done to the literary imagination.

Counterfeiting

> And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus' *Histories*, are other fragments — maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless, without rank or battalion or squadron.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[86]

> As a teacher I always try to determine what the most appropriate response to students would be in any given situation — while I, myself, remain detached from that response.
>
> Ingrid

In *Narrative and the Self*, Anthony Kerby helps us to understand that what we call the self is a product of ongoing acts of self-narration which occur with and through our daily action in the world. Our sense of personal identity, then, is not something which develops through a process of accretion where new experiences are simply piled up on top of old ones. Instead, identity is constantly being re-written through the way in which our past situations (history) and present situations co-emerge. He writes:

> [I]dentity ... is not the persistence of an entity, a thing (substance, subject, ego), but is a meaning constituted by a relation of figure to ground or part to whole. It is an identity in difference constituted by framing the flux of particular experiences by a broader story.[87]

This "broader story" is what I have described as *not-us* — the world to which we endeavor to maintain a viable and meaningful relationship. Maintaining this us/not-us relationship requires that coherence between the two be maintained — which, for the human subject means that certain things must be continually discovered and known. Our feelings of discomfort in a new situation (like traveling in a foreign country or beginning a new job) demonstrate what it is like to have this coherence disrupted. In these situations we are less sure about our own identity, for we have not yet learned what we need to know in order for a comfortable coherence to be formed. We could say that our own historical effect has not yet been re-written in terms of the unfamiliar circumstances being presented to us. And so, we tend to be more alert and more inquiring in such situations, striving to close the gap between our presently understood sense of self and the self that evolves from our interaction in this new situation.

This phenomenon was illustrated in the previous chapter with the discomfort that members of our teacher reading group felt with *The English Patient.* It was also announced in the novel itself, through the descriptions of the discomfort felt by the characters when they were unable to learn very much about the burned pilot whom Hana has been tending. For much of the novel he is presumed to be of English descent, an English pilot. And so, he is called the English patient. Towards the end of the book however, after having been given a much larger than usual dose of morphine by Caravaggio, the English patient discloses his true identity. He is not English at all, but is the famous Hungarian spy Count Ladislav de Almasy. And of course, once the others learn about his "true" identity, the relations among the four of them change. They are able to speak more freely with one another. Once the sham, the deceit of withholding, the counterfeit identity has been dropped, communal relations became strengthened, conversations became richer, understanding of each person's past in light of the present circumstances at the villa became clearer.

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[86] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 111.

[87] Ibid., 46.

What can we say about the idea of the counterfeit identity in relation to shared readings of literary texts and the school curriculum? We must begin by understanding that the act of counterfeiting is not the same as the act of fictionalizing — at least not when fictionalizing refers to a literary work of art. The fiction which we call literary is a set of invented details and circumstances which, in order to function as something that we call literary, must be unmasked as such. Unless the presented circumstances are unmasked as fictional, the imagination of the reader will not be invoked and conditioned, which means that the literary text will not be allowed to do its work. This is what distinguishes the literary text (as an example of fictionalizing) from something which is counterfeit, for in order for a counterfeit to do its work it *must not* be unmasked as such. Disclosures of this sort mean that the counterfeit is seen for what it is *not*. It is understood as a deceit, a sham, a forgery. The unmasking of counterfeit money or a forged signature means that, although both exist (they have material structure), they have no material value. This is an important distinction for it points to two things that are significant to a discussion of our relations with literary texts: First, something which is counterfeit is valueless, and therefore is culturally, socially, morally, legally, politically inert. (This is obvious in the case of counterfeit money or forged signatures). Second, it shows how things like money and signatures are never *third things* which exist *between* persons and worlds, but become material extensions of the sense of self that is contained in a world.

This is particularly evident in the case of the signature, which, in Western culture at least, serves to represent self-identity. Like the fingerprint, the signature is thought to be unique to the individual, and when produced on a document, becomes a material extension of the self. When we discover that our signature has been reproduced (forged) by another we cannot help but feel violated, for by producing a counterfeit signature, the forger is appropriating an aspect of our identity. This is why the unmasking of the forged signature renders it valueless, for although it has been produced by a self, it is not materially connected in the same way as it would be to its rightful owner. That is why the signature is so crucial on visual works of art; there is a sense that there needs to be evidence of the producer on the work, and even though the art-work is a material extension of the producer, the signature is still considered a more powerful one. This is proven by the fact that in this age of reproduction of visual and literary works, we are content with the copy if there is an original signature of the artist or author on it. The signature changes a poster into a valued work of art, a book into a more valued artifact.

Understanding the signature as a material extension of the self as it exists in relation to the world (rather than as a third thing) helps us to understand the way in which our responses to literary texts function. For although these relations are not generally visible like the signature, they share its most important characteristic: the response that one has to a literary work of art is inextricable from the person. It, like the signature, is a material extension of the self. And as we have already seen, it too can be subject to the act of counterfeiting. This counterfeiting can become manifest in two ways: through an act of unmasked fictionalizing in which a response is deliberately invented for presentation; or it through an act of withholding where no response is disclosed. The presentation of the counterfeit response is something which is seldom raised in discussions of shared relations with literary texts, yet it seems that if the counterfeit response functions in the same way as the counterfeit signature, then it too will profoundly affect the us/not-us relations of which it becomes a part.

The importance of the actual and the counterfeit response to the literary text became most apparent to me as I attempted to unravel a knot of confusion which I had concerning student interactions with the two novels being taught by two different teachers. Why was it that most of Anna's students reported highly developed personal relationships with the novel *Forbidden City*, while most of Ingrid's did not report such relationships with *The Chrysalids?* Was it because *Forbidden City* contained situations which students found more interesting and characters whom they thought were more realistic and with whom they could more closely identify than the ones presented in *The Chrysalids?* Or did it have more to do with the way in which the readings were enacted in the classroom? Did the different experiences reported by the two groups of students have more to do with the fact that one novel was read orally (performed) while the other was read silently by each student? Or could it have to do with the fact that one class was an academic stream class while the other was not? Could it be that the divergent relations had to do with differing expectations of reading that emerged from differing expectations of school from each group of students? Or could it be that one teacher presented her response to the novel as it co-emerged with her students' reading of it, while the other teacher generally withheld her response? Although I suspected that all of these factors contributed to the different reading experiences, I came to believe that it was the last one — the way in which the teacher's relationship with the novel did (or did not) become part of the text — that was most influential. It was at this point that an important question for English teachers presented itself. How significant is the teacher's relationship with the literary text, and furthermore, how important is it that this relation becomes disclosed? What happens when a counterfeit response is used in place of an actual response?

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the way in which Anna "tucked" her emerging relations with the literary text into the in-class oral readings of this novel. As she read, she "reported" to her students her developing response and relationship to the book as it existed in the ongoing relationship she was maintaining with her world. Embedded in these disclosures of her responses were continual "pointings" to connections from her past and present world. Frequent references to her trip to China, her involvement in "the marking time" issue, her husband and daughter, other books she had read, other books that she had read with this class, other discussions that she had had with this class, things that she knew about the life of the students in her class — all became a material part of the actual "text" that was being read. Through this "pointing" Anna was demonstrating that the meaning was not to be found in the text, in herself, in some critic's remarks, in the students, or as some "third thing" floating around in the room. By pointing to the text, her own experiences, her past experiences with her students, her students' experiences, Anna was helping them to understand that meaning is arrived at through continued reflections on the ongoing relationship that each of us tries to maintain with a world that is shared by others. Through action which included reflection, synthesis, and re-symbolization through class discussion and writing of these shared reading/living experiences, Anna and her students were performing currere.

That is why it was not surprising that several of her students were unable to separate information in the novel from information that they received from Anna. Kathy, for example, when telling me about an incident from the book, gave details about Tian An Men Square that had not been in the book at all, but instead in details of Anna's own trip to China. When I pointed this out to Kathy, she became rather flustered and replied, "Well, I can't separate what's in the book from what Mrs. Pilecki tells us! It's all one thing to me!"

Indeed it is. This is the embodied experience of reading and curriculum. This is what it is like when the teacher places her ever-evolving identity in the middle of the students' not-us world which, in the school classroom, includes something that we call the curriculum. This is what it is like when teachers bring forward their actual response to a literary text as it unfolds in the moments of enacted curriculum. This is what it means for teachers to apply their response — like a signature — to the classroom relations which are transformed through shared responses to literary texts. Like the signature, Anna's continued disclosures of her response became a material part of an identity which functioned, along with the text, as part of the not-us world with which each student needed to maintain a coherent relationship.

Understood as such, the teacher is not a mediator, a vehicle, or a facilitator. The teacher is not a *third thing* who mediates between text and curriculum. Nor is her response to a literary text a *third thing*. When the teacher brings forth her emerging response to the text during the event of curriculum, in relation to her students and their responses, *occasioning* is in process. And when occasioning is in process, the usually confining boundaries of the curriculum become transformed into boundaries that gather up the students, the texts, the teacher into a set of relations that *unfold* into new understandings, new possibilities. And when this occurs students can tell the difference:

> I never liked English until this year. And I never read a whole book until we read this one *[Forbidden City]* with Mrs. Pilecki ... It helped when she read to us, especially when she stopped and talked about what she thought about.
>
> Kyle

> This is the only class where I feel like I can say what I want to say. There's always lots of time for us to talk about what we think about. Especially while we're reading stories.
>
> Jessica

> I've never heard a teacher talk about a book like Mrs. Pilecki does. It's interesting hearing what she thinks about.
>
> Paul

Although the student comments about Anna's way of "teaching" were sometimes rather vague, I knew what they were trying to express, for as I spent time in Anna's class, I too felt the way in which she had become invested in the curriculum. She was not simply physically present; her very *identity* was materially part of the event of shared readings of the literary text. And the identity that was presented was not counterfeit; it was an authentic material extension of her historically effected self.

Now this should not be entirely surprising, for as discussed in chapter five, Anna was the kind of person who tended to take her reading seriously — a person who dedicated herself to the literary text — and who, as a reader attempted to *listen* to what the text seemed to be saying to her. Part of her teaching attitude precisely mirrored this tendency, for alongside the disclosures of identity through her deliberate "think alouds" to her students were lengthy periods of listening, where Anna would encourage students to verbalize their own thoughts on a passage just read. It was this listening that almost every student whom I interviewed commented on. And, in almost every instance, the importance of Anna's ability to demonstrate a listener's stance was described in relation to some incident emerging from conversation about a passage from a literary text. Ray's comments demonstrate this:

> I usually don't say anything in my other classes — teachers don't really care what we think anyway. But I do in this one ... Mrs. Pilecki really listens to me ... Like, yesterday when we were reading about AK 47's she remembered that I knew a lot about military weapons and asked me to explain what an AK 47 was.

For the students, this kind of listening attitude, coupled with disclosures of Anna's response and opportunities for them to discuss their evolving response, largely eliminated the "three thing" phenomenon that is prevalent in the school curriculum. No longer were the text, the readers, and the meaning three things. No longer were *being, knowing* and *doing* three things. Because Anna's own relation with the text (and of course her identity which was inextricable from that response) was brought forward during the lived experience of reading with her students, the literary imagination was able to become integrated into that lived experience. And because the literary imagination's function is to render the familiar strange — to broaden the range of perception and understanding — Anna was successful in making the commonplace for interpretation, as announced by the inclusion of the literary text, a "bigger" than usual experience.

But this was not the case in Ingrid's classroom, for although Ingrid felt a deep commitment to her relationship with *The Chrysalids,* and an equally deep one to her students, she did not feel able, in the same way as Anna did, to include as part of the curriculum her actual response to the text. In large part, this was because Ingrid felt very strongly that students should develop their own opinions without the influence of the teacher. Therefore, even though she wished them to have a particular experience with the novel that she hoped would influence their actions in the world, she did not wish to unduly influence them. She explained:

> I have very strong opinions. I know that. And I have worked very hard to try to remain neutral in the classroom, because I think that my students need to form their own opinions from the information presented. Now, I know that I control that information, and in a way, in doing so, control what they might decide about certain things. And I accept that. But I am always very careful about keeping my personal life and my personal opinions to myself.

And so, although I knew that Ingrid *did* have a strong personal relationship with *The Chrysalids,* there was little evidence of this during the first part of the unit which included the students' reading of the text as well as various other activities. Given the importance of the general themes emerging from this novel and the unit that it announced, I expected a great deal of class discussion. However, even when there was opportunity for this, students remained strangely reticent and withdrawn. Ingrid had commented on this in one of our early conversations:

> This class doesn't discuss. They just won't talk to me or to each other about anything. Nothing I do to encourage them seems to work. I've just about given up trying to have a discussion about anything with this class.

When I asked students why they were so reluctant to speak in class there was general agreement among them that their silence emerged, in large part, from an inability to know what to say — to know what was expected and what was appropriate. This was relatively unproblematic with lessons that emerged from the reading of non-literary texts, or with lessons which dealt with topics *about* literary texts (figurative devices, writing style, etc.), for in each Ingrid could be consulted for a "correct" response. However, when the literary text was used as the primary text for response and the kind of thinking which announced a location for reflective thought in the classroom, students felt some confusion which, it seems, largely emerged from Ingrid's decision not to embed her personal response into the curriculum. Although several students indicated how they felt about this absence, Michelle's comment was the most direct:

> Why should I say how I felt about the book? Mrs. Matisz doesn't say anything about how she felt! Maybe if I knew what she thought about it I might want to say more.

Withholding is a form of counterfeiting, for by withholding response the teacher is withholding all of her relations which are connected to that response. This means that the identity that is brought forth in the school classroom is a counterfeit identity. It is an identity that has been fictionalized through acts of suppression. In *Practice Makes Practice*, Deborah Britzman explains how the teacher's identity becomes a counterfeit:

> For those who leave this world to enter teacher education their first culture shock may well occur with the realization of the overwhelming complexity of the teacher's work and the myriad ways this complexity is masked and misunderstood. But what occurs as well is the startling idea that the taking up of an identity means suppressing aspects of the self. So at first glance, becoming a teacher may mean becoming someone you are not.[88]

When curricular relations are developed around discursive practices which situate teachers as persons who know and students as persons who must learn to know from teachers, then the texts which mediate these relations simply become understood as fuel for the curriculum learning machine. In such discursive practices the masking of the teacher's out-of-class identity is seldom problematic, for when learning is constructed as a "third thing" which exists between students and teachers, it is relatively easy for the teacher to "stand outside" of the engagement between learner and what is to be learned and to serve as a pedagogical "tour guide." Because the literary text *depends* upon the personal engagement of the reader in order for the literary imagination to become invoked, the school curriculum can less easily discount the teacher's relationship with the text. As we learned in earlier chapters, the meaning evoked by the literary imagination is not to be found in the reader or in the text, but in the relations between the reader and a world that contains that text. Therefore, it is not that students are *unable* to have a strong and deep relation with a literary text in the absence of knowledge about the teacher's response, it is simply that it is virtually impossible for the literary imagination to work in the collective space of the curriculum if the teacher deliberately withholds her response. And when the teacher does not (or feels unable to) point to herself, but only to her students and the literary text, students begin to believe that the "meaning" is in the text, in the teacher's knowledge, or in themselves.

This leads to a type of curriculum touring, for without being able to fully dwell in the commonplace announced by the literary text, the teacher becomes excluded from that world. And so, although Ingrid was extremely effective at "pointing" to aspects of the text, these pointings did not lead to the kind of "pathbuilding" that occurs when the teacher is fully invested in the commonplace location. Because Ingrid did not feel able to reveal her personal response to this novel as it evolved with the ongoing classroom activities, breaches were formed between Ingrid and her students, and between the students and a world which included her and the literary text. Because the literary text is only a *component* of the not-us world with which each student must maintain coherence in the classroom, it is impossible for students to ignore the teacher during class readings of the literary text. When the teacher discloses nothing of herself, she is unable to disclose much of her actual relation to the text, for the two are inextricable. It was a dilemma that caused Ingrid a great deal of stress and anxiety:

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[88] Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice*, 4.

> Teaching this novel has affected me more than I ever thought that it would. I am finding it so hard to not tell students how I am feeling — not just about what happens in the book, but also what is happening with *their* response to it. I'm just so distressed that there are so many of them that don't seem to understand how they are implicated in the very same kind of oppressive social structures that are described in the novel.

Even so, Ingrid remained true to her belief that it was not the teacher's right to embed her own experiences in the curriculum. Like many teachers who were educated in the heyday of behaviourist psychology, Ingrid believed that the subject must remain subtracted from the teacher, as a *third thing* that must simply be presented to the students. The teacher's job is to guide and direct, not to disclose and personally influence. It seemed that although Ingrid had hoped that the reading of this novel might help her students learn to see what they had previously not been able to see, her own counterfeit identity, in the form of the *absent* identity, created an insurmountable breach for many of her students. As Leslie explained:

> I think that Mrs. Matisz is really good at teaching English. She knows more about the subject than any other teacher that I have ever had. And I don't mind coming to her class because I know that what I learn here will help me next year .... She really seems to care about this subject. But I don't think that she cares about me.

But Michelle was wrong. I knew that. I knew that Ingrid, like Anna, did not just care about the subject matter, but cared deeply for her students — the kind of pedagogical caring that Max van Manen has called "thoughtful and tactful" caring.[89] Van Manen has made a crucial distinction between the conventional use of the word pedagogy in North America and its understanding in Europe.[90] He explains that in North America, the word pedagogy tends to serve as a label for the kind of thinking and reasoning that teachers do in order to present, as effectively as possible, the curriculum-of-the-day to their students. Pedagogy, understood in this way, becomes an act that is somehow removed from who the teacher *is*. Van Manen suggests that pedagogy must not be isolated from the idea of the *pedagogical relation* which, as it is understood and practiced in Europe, might help us to better understand how teaching is always a cultural activity steeped in various competing discourse systems. The pedagogical relation, understood as such, does not merely depend on what the teacher *knows* or what the teacher *does*, but on who the teacher *is*. The teacher's beliefs, her own virtues, her character, her relationship with a world *that includes her students* must always be considered in any discussion of pedagogy. The good teacher, according to van Manen, is therefore not merely a person who is able to guide learners through effective learning programs; the good teacher is one who is able to invest themselves *thoughtfully* into the complex set of relations which comprise the school curriculum.

It would seem difficult to establish and maintain the pedagogical relation that van Manen describes with the counterfeit identity — whether this is an identity of absence or whether it is a deliberate fictive construction. For if we believe that our relations with each other and our world are indeed embodied, and if we believe that they are historically effected, and at the same time recursive, then identity is inextricable from ongoing structural coupling with a world. In fact identity always co-emerges with the world of significance that we bring forward with others. And if we understand this, then it becomes rather clear that the literary imagination will not be able to function as it might in the school classroom that is ruptured by the exclusion of the teacher's relationship with it, for the absence of the relationship with the text requires the absence of the teacher's identity.

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[89] Max van Manen, *The Tact of Teaching* (London, ON: The Althouse Press, 1991).

[90] Although a thorough discussion of pedagogy is provided in *The Tact of Teaching*, van Manen has recently elaborated on some of his ideas, particularly in relation to different conceptions of pedagogy in North America and The Netherlands in a recent article entitled "Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching" forthcoming in *Curriculum Inquiry*, (Summer): 1994.

Even though the counterfeit identity is only meant to stand in place of the teacher's out-of-school identity, it cannot help but become a part of the teacher's life and the teacher's world. And so, once again, the question of what teaching has done to teachers again presents itself. And the question of what teaching has done to teacher's reading of literary texts is again presented. For although the inclusion of the literary text in the school curriculum is meant to encourage out-of-school relationships with literary texts, it seems that perhaps the opposite is being accomplished. Perhaps the kinds of relationships developed around counterfeit identities (for it is not just teachers who bring these to their school readings; students do too) have ruined us for out-of-school readings. Perhaps this is why some high school students who love to read at home, hate to read at school. And perhaps this is why many high school English teachers whom I know *only* read for school. Perhaps the counterfeit identity has, from years of teaching, finally gained dominance.

Unmasking

> In Ortona she had held cigarettes to the mouth of the boy with no arms. Nothing stopped her. She had continued her duties while she secretly pulled her personal self back.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[91]

> When I first started teaching this unit, and all these emotions came up, I thought that I would just do like always — subtract myself from them. But that hasn't been very easy. I'm not sure you can do that without causing a great deal of harm to yourself.
>
> Ingrid

It is not surprising that beginning teachers experience a great deal of anxiety in the classroom, for the act of assuming the counterfeit identity of "the teacher" has not yet become a habit. The mask of "teacher" has not yet been fully developed and, as such, there are glimpses of the non-teacher identity which become visible to the students. And this becomes a bit of a problem, for unlike the literary text which *must* become unmasked in order for it to function as such, the counterfeit identity of the teacher must not. For it is in the unmasking of the counterfeit identity (we could also call it the fictive identity) that would turn it into a kind of *fiction*. And when the identity of the teacher is seen as a fiction — when the teacher is unmasked — he or she is perceived as a fraud; someone who has deceived her or his students into believing that he is someone that she or he is not. And when this happens, the students feel like any person who has been deceived; they feel violated. So it is not surprising that they react strongly to teachers who cannot maintain the counterfeit identity. Because the teacher's identity is always part of the not-us world with which students must maintain a relationship, the presence of conflicting teacher identities renders the students' worlds chaotic and unstable. They become confused as to how they must respond, for there are, in fact, two persons present.

Teachers who are effective at maintaining the counterfeit identity are usually able to successfully maintain classroom relations through the "three things" configuration — teacher, subject matter, students. Although the three interact, they are always considered separate. The literary text, of course, refuses this construction, for if the literary imagination is to be invoked, the actual, rather than the counterfeit identity must participate in the reading. This does not mean that the reading cannot occur with the counterfeit identity; in fact both readings can and usually do occur simultaneously. That is why it is possible for both teachers and students to have a "personal" response to a literary text which remains private, and a schooled response which becomes used in the school curriculum. However, because these schooled responses can only become enacted through the counterfeit identity invoked for school purposes, it must spring from the discursive practices associated with school. This helps us to understand why schooled responses to literary texts are generally pre-occupied with talk *about* the texts, since school discourse is generally founded upon technical, processing metaphors in which both what one knows and who one is are considered two things that need not interact.

Most students in secondary schools quickly learn that it is the schooled response that is required in readings of literary texts rather than a response that might emerge from their own imagination as conditioned by the literary text. For although personal response has become popular, it is still the "defensible" response to the text (i.e., that which can be somehow confirmed by details in the text) that is subject to the evaluative gaze of the teacher. Therefore, like the teacher whose counterfeit identity begins to gain dominance in the school classroom, both the teacher's and the student's schooled response to the literary text gains dominance in the English classroom.

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[91] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 178.

This phenomenon is easy to observe when talking to teachers about their reading of texts which they might be considering for use in the classroom. My experience has been that teachers seem unable to talk about these books in the same way as they do about books that they read for their own pleasure. This became especially apparent in our reading group as we moved from discussion of *The English Patient* to discussions of young adult fiction. Although there was some discussion of how each of us felt personally about these books, the discussions were far more clinical, far more oriented towards what we might *do* with these books rather than how we *were* with them. It seemed to me that once these books were announced as ones which might be used in the school curriculum, the literary imagination was suppressed by the need to read with the "teacher" identity — an identity which, for most of us, was largely a counterfeit identity, specifically constructed apart from our non-school identity.

What happens when teachers and students *are* able to unmask the counterfeit identity that many of them have constructed for school purposes? Does this unmasking, in any way, affect the relationships that they develop literary texts in the classroom? What is the value of self-disclosure in schooled relations which are meant to include the literary imagination?

Teachers who construct pedagogical relations around a counterfeit identity seldom learn very much about their students, nor do students learn very much about them. This is likely why students are often surprised to see teachers shopping for groceries, swimming at the local pool, or going to a movie with a spouse, partner, or friend. The construction of teacher identity has effectively been removed from communal life and re-situated in some closed social construction we call the public school. As Madeleine Grumet has suggested, the classroom often becomes a "bunker" in which teachers hide the work they care about behind the classroom door.[92] The trouble is, often only the self who is the teacher is allowed into the bunker, leaving the non-teacher self waiting outside that closed door. And although this other self — the one that is not the teacher — waits patiently, the day eventually comes when,after the final bell has rung and the classroom door is flung open, there is no other self waiting. Counterfeiting has its consequences.

Some teachers, however, feel able to invite the other one into the classroom before closing the door. These are the ones who tell their students that they feel tired today because it was a rough night with a colicky baby. These are the ones who, like Anna, feel that it is okay to let their students know that when they read books they sometimes are emotionally moved by them, that they sometimes become politically motivated by reading them. They are the ones who let their students know that the reading of literary texts, for them, is part of a *life*. And that is why teachers like Anna, who bring forth their actual identity into the school curriculum, are known *to* their students and know *about* their students.

When asked, Anna's students were all able to tell me many things about her out-of-school life. They knew about her husband, her daughter, where she lived, where she had vacationed, what her hobbies were, how she felt about political and social issues and so on. And Anna knew about her students. She knew about their living situations, their interests, their out-of-school lives. The pedagogical relation was not simply founded upon *doing* it was founded upon *being*. Ingrid's students, however, were not able to tell me anything about her. Nor did Ingrid seem to know much about her students. The pedagogical relations between Ingrid and her students were largely founded upon knowing and doing.

And, although this point may seem inconsequential, it is, I believe, a difference that is able to *make a difference* in the school curriculum that includes the literary text. For when who the teacher and the students *are* is deliberately included in the day-to-day activities of the classroom, the literary imagination is able to do its work. Our group experiences of reading *The English Patient* had helped all of us to understand this, for it was through this experience that we were reminded of how the literary imagination, if it is to function, must be allowed to emerge from a dedicated and fully committed relationship with that literary text. Most important, because our relationships with this text were meant to be *shared* in a communal situation, we needed to also dedicate ourselves to each other — and this meant, by an large, that we needed to drop our counterfeit teacher (or researcher) identities. However, this did not happen with all of us. It did not happen with me. Although there were members of the group who were aware of my non-counterfeit self, there were others who were not. And so, the very important fact that I developed relationships with books that were inextricable from my identity as a gay male was withheld. A type of counterfeiting.

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[92] Grumet, *Bitter Milk*, 92-93.

However, it was not the reading group experiences which caused me great discomfort, but instead, it was the experience of sitting in Ingrid's class the day in which Tony came to class to talk about what it was like to live as a gay man that became almost unbearable. For although I had felt fairly comfortable in Ingrid's classroom on previous days, I felt exposed on that day. Even though I had dressed more conservatively than usual, and sat at the back of the room rather than in the front corner where I generally sat, I still felt more visible than usual. I felt like I had on that first day of teaching at W.R. Myers School in Taber, Alberta , thirteen years prior when I overheard a student in one of my classes wonder out loud whether — like last year's music teacher whom they had tormented out of the school — I was gay too. That same wave of fear washed over me. And as I watched the students coming in the room making jokes about the fact that a "fag" would be in class that day, I could not help but wonder if they would notice that there were two of us. What would Tony tell them? Would students become more "tuned in" after his visit? Would I no longer be able to "pass" as straight?

But as I listened to Tony speak to the students about his life as an openly gay man occupying a very prominent public position in our community, I began to understand the importance of unmasking. And as Tony shared with the students how reading *The Chrysalids* had affected him, it became clear that this disclosure also affected Ingrid's students. They became more relaxed. Some who had demonstrated a well-developed homophobia began to participate in the class discussion in a way which indicated to me that they were seeing things that they had not been previously able to see. However, it was Karleen's question to Tony that seemed to finally open up the world that Ingrid had so desperately wanted her students to see:

> Do people at work treat you normally?

It was a question that Tony did not answer. Instead, he paused for a moment, looked at all of the students and said:

> The question is: "Do people at work treat me normally?" Do people treat me normally? Let me ask you that question: Are you treating me normally?

And there was silence. Uncomfortable silence. I know that I was uncomfortable, even though I knew that this was the right question. And then a burst of response from the students and Tony:

> What is normal? ... Well, that's the question! ... Am I being treated like other people? ... We're being just as polite as we were for other guest speakers....But I'm not the same as other people...Well, yeah — we *are* asking you different kinds of questions ... So is that normal? ... But, we're not treating you badly or anything ... No, not to my face, you're not! ... I know that I didn't know what to expect before you came, but now that you're here, I see things differently.

Yes, I think that most of us "saw" things differently on that day, including Ingrid:

> After Tony was here I realized how much of a difference it made that he was able to tell students about his own experiences and his own feelings. I have never heard them discuss like that before. They were like different people. And they seem to finally understand the book better. Having Tony talk about how he felt reading it really made a difference for some of my students.

It made a difference for me too. It helped me to understand that although none of our relations in the school curriculum are really able to be neatly separated out, the relationship with the literary text, if it is to perform its culturally announced function, must be allowed its *gathering* function. Like the bridge which gathers up the banks, the river, and the world beyond any visible horizon, the literary text must be *allowed* to gather up the students, the teacher, their historically effected experiences, their in-and-out-of-school-identities which co-emerge with these experiences — in an event of curriculum which *occasions*. And when occasioning is allowed in shared readings of literary texts the literary imagination becomes what Iser has called a type of "literary anthropology" where our contemplated relationships with literary texts reveal as much (or more) about us as about the text. This is the special function of the literary text.

And although one could argue that it was Tony's interaction with the students and not the literary text which was the *difference that made the difference* for these grade ten students, for Ingrid, for myself, I would suggest that it was the space opened up by the invoked literary imagination that was the important difference. For although many of the students had not felt the experience of oppression by reading *The Chrysalids*, they had a map of a possible experience that was not there before their interaction with the text. And as Tony narrated his own experiences, the students were able to re-situate themselves (and their reading map) within the world of understanding which they brought forth with Tony on that day. Jason explains:

> When Tony talked about the phone calls he got — where people said that people like him should be shot, I thought about Sophie [from *The Chrysalids*] and how she was shot. And I thought about the Jews in World War II and the slides that Dayna showed us.

Some students explained that the history of their interactions in their English classroom had not only changed their understanding, it affected their action in the world. Michelle spoke to me at length about how she had been affected:

> At first I didn't get much out of the book. But after Tony came and told us how he had been beat up for being gay — how he got phone calls saying he should be shot, and how that made him feel, I began to think about this girl that my friends and I used to bug when we were in Junior High. We were really awful to her. Sometimes she would cry....She goes to this school. I see her sometimes. I tried to say "Hi" to her the other day. But I don't think she likes me too much.

This is what it is like to be able to see what one had not previously been able to see. The various activities occasioned by Ingrid in the location announced by shared readings of a literary text in the school curriculum led to a new path of understanding for many of the students. As an event of currere, this path did not, like the waterfall simply move forward, but moved recursively — backward and forward — allatonce. And through the history of interactions in the school curriculum, which included the literary imagination, structures were altered, perceptions were changed. The hermeneutic imagination was invoked. David Smith reminds us that:

> [T]he hermeneutic imagination works to rescue the specificities of our lives from the burden of their everydayness to show how they reverberate within grander schemes of things. Hermeneutics is about finding ourselves, which also, curiously enough, is also about losing ourselves.[93]

Like the game of hide and seek, losing and finding depend on one another, and on the dedicated playing of its players. When the literary imagination is invoked as part of the school curriculum, and students and teachers are prepared to become lost for a time in the relations inspired by the text, the thrill of being found is announced.

> She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams.[94]

But we must wake up! We must shed the heaviness caused by unremembered dreams. We must learn how to see what we had previously been unable to see. And if this is to be accomplished through shared readings of literary texts in schools, we, as teachers, must stop hiding behind talk *about* texts and start living through them with our students. That means re-discovering the self that stands behind the teacher.

It is an unmasking. But it is important. The importance of unmasking.

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[93] Smith, "Hermeneutic Inquiry: The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," 187.

[94] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 12.

Chapter Seven

THE LITERARY IMAGINATION AND THE CURRICULUM

> The imagination that produces work which hears and invites rereadings, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language.
>
> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*[1]

> \What the Romantics expressed as the claim that the imagination, rather than reason, is the central human faculty was the realization that a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.
>
> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*[2]

> [I]t is through the imagination, the realm of pure possibility, that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than what we have become and merely are.
>
> Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*[3]

> When he had gone along the hall she came back to the table and sat down, trembling. Needing this table, this half-finished book in order to collect herself.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[4]

In her book *Long Quiet Highway: Waking Up in America*, Natalie Goldberg[5] writes about what it is like to live the life of a writer. In it, she does not attempt to lay out some "method" for other writers to follow, but rather indicates how writing, for her, is a particular way of living. The fact that she writes cannot be separated from the kind of person she is and the way in which she acts in her world. Whether the product of her writing is a short story, a poem or an expository essay, writing is a material manifestation of her becoming — a meditation on her life. As Goldberg suggests, "A writer's life is about self-examination."[6]

Rebecca Luce-Kapler[7]explains how a teacher's life is also about self-examination. In her study of the use of writing portfolios in schools, she suggests that just as the writer must live through writing, the teacher must live an inquiring life among the students and the teachings. For her, the teacher's life is always a part of those teachings. One does not learn to teach, one learns to live the life of a teacher. This, of course, suggests that there really is no fixed boundary between the public and the private. The teacher does not have a "public" teaching life which is separate from her or his "private" non-teaching life. Although the teacher may feel as though she or he has two identities (teacher and non-teacher) these identities are really not split; they are completely wrapped up in the teacher's ever-evolving sense of self.

As I tried to show in the last chapter, who we are, what we know and what we do as persons who teach are all caught up in each other. They are not three things, but one. And so, we can never really understand *being, doing,* or *knowing* in the absence of interpretive inquiry into the way in which these co-emerge. Teaching is inquiry and, therefore, it is not surprising that research is like teaching. In fact, I find it finally impossible to separate teaching from researching, since both involve the act of standing as an inquirer and interpreter in the world. Both teaching and researching involve the act of pointing at "this thing" rather than "that thing" in order to understand the world differently. And so, in a way, both teaching and researching are *imaginative* activities — for as I have tried to show, it is necessary for the imagination to be invoked in order for us to be able to think and act differently. It is the imagination that can help us to expand the boundaries of our historically effected, structurally-determined perceptions of the world.

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[1] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xii.

[2] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 7.

[3] Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, 91.

[4] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 31.

[5] Goldberg, *Long Quiet Highway: Waking Up in America.*

[6] Ibid., 46.

[7] Rebecca Luce-Kapler, *Never Stepping in the Same River Twice: Teaching and Writing in School* (Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Alberta: Edmonton, AB, 1994).

Therefore, it becomes rather clear that my investigations into the literary imagination and the school curriculum are inextricable from my ongoing investigations of what it means to teach. Although this research and writing has focused on the reading and teaching of the literary text, it has also included discussions of cognition, learning, and curriculum. All of these discussions have emerged from and, at the same time, have pointed to one question: What is the significance of the literary imagination when it exists with the complex set of relations we call the curriculum?

It is interesting for me to notice how perfectly logical and important this question seems now that this writing is nearly complete, for it certainly did not exist in any coherent form during the initial stages of this research. I was not sure, for example, what path the actual "research" would take. I was not exactly sure what questions I was addressing in this study. I did know, however, that if this research was to be hermeneutic, both the method and the questions needed to be allowed to present and re-present themselves during the quest for understanding. Like *currere*, the research was not to be located in the *course;* the research was the running of the course.

Now, this has not really been a very popular way to conduct research, for research is supposed to be something that is well-planned in advance. Research "methods" are to be clearly defined and determined *before* embarking on the research program. Questions are meant to be identified and clearly announced. Research is not meant to be something "discovered" while researching; it is not supposed to be a path laid down while walking. I must say, however, that although I was convinced that this was an appropriate way of approaching this research, it was not a very *comfortable* way of proceeding. There have been many times when the ambiguity of not knowing what would happen next — of not knowing what the next page might yield — has been tremendously uncomfortable and disconcerting. There have been many times when I have wished for a pre-defined path — a course to follow. However, in the end, I am rather pleased that I have allowed this research to be properly hermeneutic, for by refusing rigid, pre-imposed boundaries, I have found myself wandering further afield. And although some of this wandering has found me lost, much of it has yielded new vistas, new horizons of understanding, and, most of all, a path of inquiry that I could never have anticipated.

For me, the most important outcome of this research has been learning that all of our action in the world matters — to ourselves, and to the world. Therefore, things like the reading and the teaching of literary texts, as well as the completion of research and writing about the subject of reading and teaching literary texts, become an inextricable part of the lives of those engaged in those activities. It becomes part of their understanding of their relation to the world. It, quite literally, *becomes* them, and they *become* it. Reading, teaching, and researching, are not simply things that we *do* in the world; they are part of the ecology of *us/not-us.*

This, however, is not generally the way we think about the reading, teaching, or research. In schools we spend a great deal of time trying to improve students' reading abilities; at the university we exert the same efforts trying to help future teachers *construct* teaching identities; as researchers we work to define defensible and rigorous research methods. We usually do these things because we believe that reading, teaching and researching are *third things* — things that can simply be transposed upon an already-existing sets of relations. I have tried to show that the third thing is illusory. There is no third thing. Things like reading, teaching and researching are all part of *who we are, what we know,* and *what we do* in the world that we bring forth with others. In order to be a conscientious reader of the literary text, one must live a life that permits literary readings. In order to be an effective and thoughtful teacher one must life a life that allows teaching. In order to engage in research one must live a life that becomes configured with and through inquiry.

But this research was announced as a particular kind of inquiry: *hermeneutic* inquiry. Since that original announcement I have learned that in order to accomplish research which is hermeneutic one must live a life which is more meditative than I have been accustomed. I have found that the difference between hermeneutic research and other research that I have done is that hermeneutic research *requires* a contemplative attitude. It has meant, quite literally, finding time each day to be alone. It has meant finding time to think about who I am in relation to the persons with whom I conducted research and the literary and non-literary texts which circumscribed those lived relationships. Finally, it has meant needing to confront *myself* in relation to the ongoing experiences of reading, teaching, and researching that was being accomplished with others. In order to actually sit down and write about these co-emerging relationships, I needed to understand that the act of writing was necessarily a part of this process of inquiry. It was during this writing that I came to understand what David Smith means when he suggests that hermeneutic inquiry must always be a form of personal inquiry. He writes:

> The conversational quality of hermeneutic truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of inquiry; a showing of the dialogical journey, we might call it.[8]

As I have come to understand it, arriving at hermeneutic truth means leading a life that allows the possibility for hermeneutic truth to develop. Furthermore, it means leading a life that allows the *possibility* for this writing because, of course, writing is not merely added to a life, writing co-emerges with a life. I have found that this form of interpretive writing has required making conscious decisions to live among persons and within environments that support this kind of thinking and writing. Therefore, those who shared my life while I wrote this dissertation will find themselves in this text. They are present because they are part of the world of significance which this writing announces.

Of course, there are many ways in which the writing of a research report (a dissertation or thesis) might be written. One traditional (we could say *commonsense*) way is for the writer to decide, in advance, the organizational structure of the report and, over a period of time, complete the various sections. This really is conventional knowledge about writing. It is why we ask students to write outlines for essays they will write. We somehow believe that they need to know "in advance" what they want to say. If, however, we believe that the world is continually re-presented through our ongoing action with it (what I have called *us/not-us*) we must understand that deciding *in advance* what will be written suggests that there is nothing to be learned by living through a world that includes writing. But of course there *is* something to be learned by living through a world that includes the process of writing. That is why we should write. That is why writing is so important to the process of hermeneutic research, for it is the act of writing that often forces us to meditate upon what is *hap*pening. It is writing that forces us to choose *this* word (world) rather than *that* word (world). And so, writing must be allowed to *co-emerge* with the world of living that includes research and writing about that research. Writing which is hermeneutic must be understood as a *path laid down while walking.*

And so, I decided before commencing this writing project that I would allow the *process* of writing to teach me about the subjects I had been investigating. Writing about the literary imagination and the curriculum, then, would not simply "report" on what was learned, it would become a process of inquiry in and of itself. Of course, as Goldberg suggests, this meant that I needed to live a writing life. I needed to lead a life that did not just contain an activity that we might call writing; I needed to live like a writer. Moreover, it meant that I had to live a life that *permitted* writing which was hermeneutic. Writing needed to become a meditation.

For me, then, this text has become me and I have become it. The author is not dead, and, in a way, never will be; the trace of his interactions with a world are to be found in this text. Writing this text has been very much like the experience of being involved with the reading group during my year of research. During that year I found that I was unable to simply "do" research. I could not merely transpose my relations with the individuals in the reading group, and my later interactions with these teachers' students, onto my existing life. The research was not merely another "thing" that I did. My life inside and outside of the research was not separated. So, just as I was unable to extricate my understanding of *The English Patient* from my non-literary engagements — just as I always read the literary text *in relation* to a world — so too, did I come to understand my relation to the research in relation to the rest of my life. As a result, it is important to understand that my research into, and eventual writing about, the literary imagination and the school curriculum has not simply changed what I *know* about these topics, it has changed who I *am*. In interesting ways, it has also changed the relations that I have with the persons who participated in the research, for even though I have not spoken to several of them at all during the course of this writing, my re-interpretations of our past interactions have altered my own impressions of our relationship.

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[8] Smith, "The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," 198.

Strangely enough, I have found that the most difficult part of the research and writing process has been coming to some sort of closure. It has been difficult for me to finally sit down to compose these final comments. Perhaps it is because this meant that I needed to *compose* myself. And composing oneself, of course, requires stillness, quiet, and concentration — things that are not much valued or practiced in a hypermodern world. And so, I have resisted. I have been recalcitrant. I have procrastinated. I have offered every possible excuse for not coming up with some conclusion. But I know that this must be done, for as both Heidegger[9] and Foucault[10] have suggested, we can only understand life because there is death. We can only understand beginnings because there are endings, for endings always provoke new beginnings. And so, I have decided not to think of these final pages as a conclusion, but rather as an ending, an ending which announces new questions and new beginnings. However, endings are difficult, not just because of the melancholy associated with the conclusion of a project — of the "life" of something — but also because endings signal the need for something new, the need to begin again...The need to put up (again) with not knowing where this new path might begin, or where it might lead. Endings mean needing to re-immerse oneself in the ambiguity of not knowing what the next page might yield.

Like the ending of the life of anything, however, there needs to be ritual. And so, the ritual of gathering together — of summing up — is offered.

In the preceding chapters I have tried to show how the literary text announces a location that goes beyond everyday lived experience. The literary text, because it asks that the reader suspend disbelief, gives up the immediate world of present action and, at the same time, participates in the altering of that world. The world announced by the literary text, then, is not another world, but becomes part of what we are already living. Because the literary text takes the familiar world and renders it strange, we are re-placed in the world. We are (quite literally) re-placed by the reading self: the self that reads. And the reading self is not the same as the non-reading self. The identity of the reading self is altered because of reading. However, this reading self cannot be subtracted from the ecology of *us/not-us*. The literary text does not simply make the world larger through a process of accretion; the literary text alters the very relations of the world in which it exists. The literary text announces a reformulated location for our selves; it alters our structure; it transforms our history; it changes our present and future identities and action in the world.

But, of course, it is finally impossible to talk about the reading of literary texts in schools without talking about the way in which our understandings of these are wrapped up in a life that includes school. The previous chapters have, in some way, attempted to show this integration. They have attempted to demonstrate the importance of understanding a curriculum that includes shared readings of literary texts as a particular unity which has an integrity and which participates fully in the co-emergence of *identity*. Most of all, these chapters have attempted to show how the words we use to describe our experience of reading, teaching, and living among literary texts become meaningful. They have tried to show that although the meanings ascribed to these words are continually evolving, the invoking of words like *literary* and *teaching* and *imagination* have historically effected meanings. These meanings, although never fixed, nonetheless point to aspects of our individual and collective experiences. This helps us to understand that, even though we are indeed thrown into a world, we are not thrown into a formless world. And we are not formless. We enter into a world with an historically effected biological structure. We call this heredity. And then we live through and with a world; we and the world are mutually specified over the *course* of our lives. We call this lived experience. I have tried to emphasize, however, that what we call *biological* and what we call *phenomenological* are inseparable. The living we do always begins and ends in the location of our body as it exists temporally, spatially and existentially *with* and *through* a world that co-evolves with us.

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[9] In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that an understanding of human existence necessarily depends upon the knowledge that existence will end. Death gives life meaning.

[10] During the course of his life, Foucault became intrigued by the idea of death as a limit-experience. He believed that it was at the threshold between life and death that deep pleasure and unusual understanding might be realized. See James Miller's biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, for an insightful discussion of this.

This, I believe, is highly significant, for it suggests that we neither determine nor are determined by our world. Rather, we co-evolve with a world. What we do changes the world, while, at the same time, what every other living unity does changes the world. And the world changes us. It happens *allatonce*. As coherence among *us/not-us* is maintained we remain successfully coupled to a world. We arrive at meanings that allow successful coupling to be maintained. Now, of course, all of these *meanings* are the product of an historically effected culture. Therefore, as Foucault[11] has so convincingly explained, any meaning that we consider *normal* or *deviant* is nothing given or natural, but is part of our history of interactions with one another within social constructions that we call *culture*. Biologically speaking, these interactions are inscribed in and through us, so that we might concur with Chomsky[12] when he suggests that we do not merely *learn* language, but that we are biologically pre-disposed to do so. The deep structure of language is *inscribed* in our physiology.

But, of course, although this dissertation has discussed human evolution and cognition, it has been most specifically about the literary imagination and the school curriculum. And perhaps these two phrases require some further excavation. I would like to say, that although these phrases are separated by the conjunction *and* in the title, they are not meant to be considered apart from one another. At the same time, they are not meant to signify a particular sequential relationship. The literary imagination is not meant to be understood as something which is simply *added to* the school curriculum, nor is the school curriculum meant to be understood as a *consequence* of the literary imagination. Like Gadamer, who did not intend *Truth and Method* to mean that truth depended on method, but rather that truth co-emerged *with* method, I have endeavored to show that neither the school curriculum nor the literary imagination depend on one another, nor is there any cause/effect relationship between them. The literary imagination cannot simply be transposed onto an already-existing curriculum as an added feature. Invoking the literary imagination as part of the school curriculum is not the same as adding air conditioning to a car. It is not a frill; it is not a gadget. In fact, although the literary imagination has been given a name, it is not really a thing at all. What I have called the literary imagination is simply a place holder for the kind of activity that co-emerges with a life that includes the act of reading literary texts. And, as discussed in chapter two, the literary text can never be pinned down to some *fixed* form, but is instead a written form which, over the centuries, has been ascribed the cultural function of enabling the reader to suspend disbelief while reading. It is an art form which endeavors to help human subjects to perceive ordinary things in our world differently. It is a text which is meant to situate readers in a re-configured world of significance that is made possible because of the conditioned literary imagination.

We could say that the literary imagination is a culturally approved and normalized form of madness, for if madness is defined as the departure from reality where unusual thoughts occur and eccentric behaviors are exhibited — if the "mad" person appears to act and react in an *abnormal* way — then the literary imagination could be said to promote madness for, in effect, that is part of its announced function. Therefore, it is not surprising that the literary text is sometimes viewed with suspicion, for there is an understanding that the literary text is powerful. It is a witchcraft that can bring things into being that were not there before. It is an invoking of ideas that are not currently part of the world that is brought forth with others. And so, the literary imagination is something which is often marginalized and sometimes feared, for it often raises in the reader images, ideas, thoughts, and actions that could not exist without the presence of the literary text.

Understanding the literary text and the literary imagination meant inquiring into what it means to live with others in a biological and phenomenological world. And so, I invoked the work of continental philosophers and reconceptualist cognitive theorists to help understand that world. I finally came to understand that we are in a continual movement through *us/not-us*. Gadamer has called the same phenomenon the *hermeneutic circle of understanding*. Maturana and Varela call it *structural coupling* or *mutual specification*. What this understanding of our interactions in the world teaches us is that all action and thought matters. Even though there are things which may be silenced, marginalized, suppressed or deferred, they cannot help but exist within *us/not-us*.

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[11] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* , trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972).

[12] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

The idea of embodied action figures prominently in this writing. Even though it is really impossible to imagine action in the world that does not originate and culminate in some physical body, I have deliberately used the phrase embodied action to indicate the double sense of embodiment. Like Merleau-Ponty, I wish to understand the body as a biological and phenomenological structure. These two things, of course, become part of the unity of the body and co-emerge with each other. I also use embodiment to point out the fact that our system of cognition is not contained in some central processing device that we might call the brain. Our system of cognition is inscribed in and through our entire bodies. There are body memories. At the same time, our bodies are not really self contained within our skins. Although it *seems* like we are self contained, we must remember that the skin permits interaction between the body and the world. We are, literally, part of the environment in which we exist. Our body, quite literally, is an environment. At the same time, what we might call a mind always exists in the unity of *us/not-us*. This helps us to understand that the meanings that we develop for anything are not meanings that are in the world or in the body. Nor are they some *third thing* that exists between the world and the body. The world *means* differently because each of us lives and acts in and with a world.

This is not meant to suggest that there are not differences between things and persons that are contained in our environment. Of course there are. We give the name *identity* to the concept of distinguishing between things. We must remember, however, that various identities are not the product of some cause-effect relationship, nor are identities fixed. Even if the material structure of something remains visually unaltered to the human eye, its identity continually evolves over time.

Shakespeare's original *Hamlet*, for example, can never have the same identity as it had when first written. Over time, it has been involved in the interaction between readers and the world and, therefore, the text, the readers, and the meanings arrived at have all been part of a history of interactions resulting in particular identities. My identity is altered because I have read *Hamlet*. The text of *Hamlet* is altered because I have read it. It is not just altered for me, it has a different identity in the world. Although this is not obvious by looking at the marks on the page, we must remember that these marks are merely significations for our continued understanding of our interaction in the world. If my interaction in the world changes, so too does my (and the world's) understanding of those marks. So, *Hamlet* is, in fact, altered because I have read it. Is the world altered because Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been written? Of course! As Heisenberg noted while touring Kronberg castle, the way he thinks about the castle is different because his literary imagination was invoked during the act of a fictive reading. What is fiction and what is real are mutually specified.

This became apparent in our reading group's interactions with *The English Patient*. Our interactions with each other were altered because of our interactions with the text. And they were altered in different ways because this text required us to perceive differently. When readers are successful at perceiving differently through their interaction with the literary text they cannot help but exist and act differently in the world. This does not mean, however, that the literary text *causes* all readers to think and perceive and act differently. As pointed out, some readers are simply not *able* to have the kind of experience with the text that invokes the literary imagination. As human subjects we are, indeed, structure-determined. This does not mean that our structure determines our action, nor does it mean that the world cannot alter our structure; it simply means that there is no direct cause-effect relationship between the two. When discussing reading, this means that the reader does not cause meaning in the text, nor does the text cause meaning in the reader. It means that both the reader and the text live in the unity of a particular world. The text is read *in relation to* that world.

Furthermore, the text is read in relation to an historically effected world. Reading the literary text cannot be done in the absence of a reading and interpreting of the world of which that text is a part. That is why Freire[13] suggests that the reading of the *word* is a reading of the *world*. This formulation is not unlike my discussion of reading as an act of unskinning, where the immediate identities of readers, texts, other things in the world are transformed during the act of reading. With the act of successful reading of a world that includes the reading of a text there is a momentary fusion of these disparate identities and a simultaneous re-covering of them. Unskinning refers to this continual transformation of identity and understanding during all of our interactions with the world. I have suggested, however, that because it re-configures that world, the literary imagination promotes greater than usual transformations.

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[13] Freire discusses this in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

And what of the school curriculum? Like the literary text, the school curriculum announces a culturally created and socially situated set of relations. So, although the curriculum may be identified by particular texts, circumstances, conditions, and interpersonal relationships, curriculum is largely something that is meant to condition a set of relations that are particular to education in schools. The school curriculum, as I have defined it, is the particular set of relations (textual and human) that make up what teachers and students do in schools. And like all of our other circumstances in the world, the school curriculum is always at the endpoint of historical effect. We are always, we might say, *thrown* into school curriculum. However, we do not merely transpose our identities onto curriculum. Our very identities are changed because of our involvement in curriculum. And the very identities of the texts that are read are changed because of curriculum. This helps us to understand why the identity of the literary text is changed because of its involvement in curriculum. Like the identity of a person, the identity of any literary text changes when it moves from one location to another. Literary works of art that are read for school purposes become part of the social relations that comprise the act of public schooling. When we read a literary text in school we always read them in relation to everything else that comprises that world of understanding. It is in the location sponsored by these horizontal readings that curriculum identity transformations occur.

Finally, I have tried to show that it is really impossible to understand the function of the literary imagination in schools without a deep understanding of curriculum, for it is the idea of curriculum that announces the particular set of relationships that occurs in schools. And these relationships, although always part of the world, also have a specific identity in the world. As Madeleine Grumet suggests:

> Curriculum is, after all, artifice, deliberately designed to direct attention, provoke response, and express value; it reorders experience so as to make it accessible to perception and reflection.[14]

And so, like the literary imagination which functions as a place holder for relations among persons and texts which announce a location for the conditioned imagination, curriculum is not a *third thing* that exists between students and teachers. Rather, it is a material part of the relations which occur in places that we call school. And, because it is, as Grumet suggests, a set of intertextual relations that is meant to provoke response and alter perception, then it seems crucial to include in these relations the conditioned literary imagination for, in the end, both curriculum and the literary imagination have the same culturally announced task: they are both meant to help us to perceive what we have previously been unable to perceive.

With this thought, I would like to end by returning to the beginning. I would like to return to my initial wondering about my unanticipated emotional response to *Bridge to Teribitha* while reading it aloud to my grade seven class. In my initial reporting of that response, I indicated that, although the response became apparent to my students, I felt unable to discuss it with them. Although the response was announced, it remained uninterpreted. An uninterpreted *hap* we might say. But, in the end, although it occurred years later, it was this *hap* which inspired me to investigate the experience of sharing the reading of literary texts with students in locations we call curriculum. And so, although I initially expressed some concern about the fact that this hap remained uninterpreted, I have come to understand that, hermeneutically speaking, interpretation need not be immediate. In fact, hermeneutic interpretation is likely *not* to occur in action. Hermeneutic reflection and interpretation requires time. It requires meditation. It requires a hermeneutic location.

What, then, might I say about this event, seven years later, in relation to the location announced by *this* text? How might that event be read horizontally with this text? What has this research and this writing taught me about that moment? Hermeneutics teaches us that experiences must be understood in terms of their historically effected circumstances and so, before this question is explored, an excavation of that moment in time is necessary.

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[14] Grumet, *Bitter Milk*, 79.

As already mentioned, this public oral reading occurred during a time when our school staff and I were still mourning the loss of our Principal. And, certainly, this must have contributed to my feelings of empathy for Jesse and Mrs. Myers. But I knew then, and I know now, that there were other events that contributed to that response. That reading occurred during the 1986-87 school year in a mid-sized rural school in southwestern Alberta. Now, this part of Alberta is farming country. The people are hardy, steadfast, resolute. They live in a geographical location that is hot, dry and windy in the summer, cold and unforgiving in the winter. It is a stark land, with little ornamentation. The geography is flat, definite, obvious, straightforward. It is the prairie, and on the prairie little is hidden. There is no-where to hide. As my mother told me forty years after emigrating to this land from the south of Germany: "It is a place where I feel exposed and confined. I have never felt comfortable here."

Tourist brochures call it "Big Sky Country." The sky *is* big. It looms. It watches over a definite land. And so, it is not surprising that over the last hundred years this land has attracted persons who were also definite. Christian fundamentalism and right wing politics seem to go well with the land. Being right is important. Being definite. Knowing the way things should be. Including the land. It is also not surprising that this once-arid desert-like environment was made to grow things that were not meant to grow there. New crops became possible because the rivers were dammed, the water collected, and allowed to trickle through the prairie grasses. It is important to be definite. It is important to know the way things *should* be. The land submits; it yields: corn, onions, potatoes, sugar beets.

The rhythm of the school year was marked by the sugar beet season. In late Spring it was easy to identify students who lived on farms where sugar beets were grown. They arrived at school sleepy and tired, for sugar beets need to be watered frequently in the Spring and most farmers still had to move the irrigation pipes manually. Every four hours — 10 p.m., 2.a.m., 6 a.m. The pipes needed to be moved on time, because, of course, it is important for things to occur on time. For the land is recalcitrant; it resists submission. And later in the Spring — in late May and early June — the sugar beets needed to be thinned. "Hoeing beets," it was called. This was back-breaking, low-paying labour which was largely done by seasonal workers. Some were Mexican Mennonites who traveled north after working the Winter in the California vegetable fields. Sometimes their younger children came to school for a month. They spoke a strange combination of German, Spanish and English. We were never really sure what to do with them. Others were Indians from one of the nearby Indian reservations who lived in the "beet shacks" that dotted the fields.

My Polish father and German mother emigrated to southern Alberta in the early 1950s. Soon after arriving they purchased a small two-room house in the city of Lethbridge. It was a beet shack that had been moved into town.

In October the sugar beets were harvested and deposited in piles the size of small mountains alongside the highway that took me to school each morning. After a week or two they began fermenting. On cold mornings alcoholic steam rose from those grey-brown beet mountains. The sugar factory was one kilometer from the junior high school where I taught. I could see it and smell it from my classroom window. In the mid-eighties it was discovered that it cost more than twice as much to grow and process sugar beets than the sugar was worth. Only government subsidies allowed beet farming to remain profitable and these subsidies were in danger of being lost. A large delegation of farmers went to Ottawa to protest the loss of a livelihood. Sugar beets are still grown in southern Alberta. It is important to be definite. It is important to be right. It takes a ton of sugar beets to produce a small bag of sugar. It is important that the land yield.

Many of my students belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons. Most Mormon teenagers attended seminary every morning for one hour before school began. One day, I overheard two girls discussing their lesson from that morning. For homework they had been asked to think about what they would do if they found themselves in love with "Norman the non-Mormon." I asked them if they thought they would marry Norman. "Definitely not," they said. It is important to be definite. It is important to be right. It is important to yield. The same girls told me that once they finished high school they would go to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. They were going to pursue a degree in Home Economics. The non-Morman kids told me that girls went to BYU to get their MRS. Every now and then over the years I would find a copy of *The Book of Mormon* on my desk with pages marked for me to read. I had a collection of them in the bottom drawer of my filing cabinet. Unread. It is important to be definite.

Our deceased principal had not been Mormon. However, he had gone to BYU many years prior on a basketball scholarship. Since then, however, he had not once attended a Mormon church service. Upon his sudden passing, the local Mormon community kindly took care of all the funeral arrangements. Before Don's funeral on that unseasonably hot day in May, I had not set foot in a Mormon church. It seemed strange seeing Don in that place. I had purchased a new tie for the funeral and felt choked by it.

In his novel about life in a small prairie town, W.O. Mitchell writes about the way in which the people of the town were depicted in the local newspaper:

> In the pages of the *Shelby Chinook* the people of the town and district lived blameless lives. They neither raped nor were raped. They were heterosexual. They held rodeos and church suppers, ran curling bonspiels, turkey shoots, community bingo games, bridge and whist parties; they paraded and observed three minutes of silence on Remembrance Day, and danced at Thanksgiving, Hallowe'en, New Year's, and Valentine's Day. They became engaged, married, went into hospital, and were born always in wedlock, died of old age, accident, or sickness, but never of suicide or murder. From railways, chartered banks, implement firms, the civil service, and grain elevator and lumber companies they were transferred or retired; they did not embezzle, nor were they ever debauched, disrobed, or defrocked.[15]

It is important to be right. It is important to be definite.

During that same year in southern Alberta a dozen or so men died of complications from AIDS. This was not a well-known statistic, for one did not often hear people speak of things such as AIDS. Unless it was some tasteless joke told by one of the junior high kids or, on occasion, by one of the teachers. Those jokes, along with ones about "fags" and "lezzies" was the one form of hatred that was generally approved. And so, it was not surprising that when David, a young man who had graduated from the local high school ten years prior, died at his parents home after a long battle with AIDS, no-one seemed to know about it. At least I heard no-one speak of it. Although human sexuality was taught as part of the health curriculum, the section about HIV and AIDS and safe sex was deleted. It is important to be definite. I knew several of the men who died that year and called in sick to attend two of the funerals. It was not difficult to return to school the next day looking a bit unwell. It is important to know what is right.

In this writing I have tried to show the way in which literary texts are always read in relation to the world which announces them. They always exist in a location. And like Heidegger's image of the bridge, the literary text has the potential to gather up the experiential landscape around it. It has this ability, not because of what it *is*, but because of the way is allowed to stand in the *us/not-us* world. It is, at the same time, familiar and strange, and it is this very juxtaposition of known and unknown that allows experience to become re-organized. And so, it is not surprising that when readers become part of a location gathered up by the literary text, unexpected responses occur.

I have also tried to show how what is silenced, what is deferred, what is marginalized and invisible is an absence that is always present. And this includes the invisible landscape which exists with our readings of literary texts. It includes the histories that we bring into places like classrooms and it includes the history of interactions that comprise our lived experience in those classrooms. Therefore, although the curriculum is something deliberately designed to provoke, to point out, to illuminate, at the same time it is something which silences, hides, covers. There is much which is re-covered during events of curriculum.

Although we pretend that literary texts are read vertically, I have tried to show that they are not. Any literary text has a life that exists in the horizontal and vertical landscape of our experience in the world. And so, it is important to understand that reading *Bridge to Teribithia* to a group of grade seven students from Taber, Alberta, under the shadow of the sugar factory, in the presence of the memory of the dead, in the middle of a school day which included a censored health curriculum, after the fact that my parents lived in a beet shack, in relation to Norman the non-Mormon, was a reading of the world.

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[15] W.O. Mitchell, *Roses are Difficult Here*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 10.

Finally, I have tried to show how the the public literary reading resists the usual configuration of lived experience in the school classroom. The literary text, because it *requires* the reader to perceive differently in order for meaning to be evoked, sometimes alters the world of significance that is brought forth with others. And so, there are times during the reading of a literary text when we suddenly notice (but often only briefly) that a new vista of perception and understanding has been illuminated. And we respond. Sometimes this response uncovers previously unnoticed components of *us/not-us*. Sometimes unskinning occurs. And when this happens the reader notices. And if the reading is also a performance (an oral reading), sometimes others notice too.

It is a difference that makes a difference.

> *This was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became half her world.*
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*[16]

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[16] Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 7.

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